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“EDUCATION AND CULTURE IN AFRICA’S QUEST FOR  
DEVELOPMENT”**



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***UNESCO PRELIMINARY CONTRIBUTION***

**“EDUCATION AND CULTURE  
IN AFRICA’S QUEST FOR DEVELOPMENT”**

UNESCO

**EDUCATION AND CULTURE  
IN AFRICA'S QUEST FOR DEVELOPMENT**

**PRELIMINARY CONTRIBUTION**

**Introduction**

1. The development of Africa is, and will continue to be very much dependent on its human development, which should be understood as including both the development of its human resources and an endogenous project for society that can respond to its deep-rooted material, intellectual, moral and spiritual aspirations. This project, which holds out hope for a restored, outward-looking African identity, bears little relation to that of an Africa seeking refuge in an idealized past: it is the project of an ambitious, emancipated Africa confident in its ability to envisage the paths to its renewal, which will come about through the restoration of vast opportunities for solidarity, exchanges and sharing, thus returning to its most authentic cultural traditions while placing Africa squarely in the mainstream of the emerging global knowledge society. These were the ideas of which, for one, Alpha Oumar Konaré, President of the Commission of the African Union, recently<sup>1</sup> spoke.
2. The main purpose of human resources development – of which education and culture are closely-linked, key components – is to train individuals – men and women – to take a full part in the development process of their society while keeping alive essential values.
3. **Education** is a fundamental human right and the most powerful lever for the promotion of welfare, civic and social advancement, the progress of democracy and respect for human rights, the building of peace and the promotion of an environment that allows pluralism, knowledge – including scientific and technological knowledge – and cultural diversity to prosper. As such, it is a precondition for sustainable development, economic growth and poverty reduction.
4. **Culture** is what has shaped societies' and individuals' ways of life; while certainly rooted in ancestral values, it is also a source of dialogue,

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<sup>1</sup> Address by H.E. A-O. Konaré during his visit to UNESCO Headquarters on 28 May 2004.

exchange, innovation and creativity, and the foundation stone of endogenous systems of solidarity, forms of expression and ways of transmitting knowledge that are as valid for meeting the challenges of tomorrow as for preserving traditions. As such, culture is therefore, in today's world, a means of achieving a more satisfactory intellectual, moral and spiritual existence, while having often unrecognized potential in terms of economic development and efforts to combat poverty.

5. Without being in any way a panacea, the interaction between culture and education – and the many synergies it implies – can become a major factor for widening the range of options open to all in the perspective of ensuring sustainable development in Africa in an age of globalization. This has been recognized by many African leaders. Within the NEPAD process, while it was agreed that the initial NEPAD action plan on education and human resources development (June 2002) would be reviewed before being submitted to Heads of State/Government, no visible engagement exists as yet with respect to the field of culture. African leaders' decision to consider the areas of education and culture together at the January 2006 Summit is thus an auspicious development, allowing thought to be given to the interactions between these two sectors. This paper seeks to stimulate such reflection, with a view to crafting a new agenda for both the education and culture sectors based on a more holistic, interdisciplinary approach that recognizes the mutual benefits of harnessing the added value of the education-culture interface.

## **Background**

6. African societies from earliest times were socially organized, though far from flawless, structures of communities with shared cultural values and views. Each society developed belief systems, technology, forms of participatory governance and socio-economic activities appropriate to its geographical location and needs. The views and approaches underlying them were the object and subject of education.
7. Education was considered a shared social responsibility, implemented through various channels – both formal and non-formal – and by a number of actors, with women playing a major role, albeit unequally perceived or experienced. The family, the clan, the tribes, the elders, the peer groups, and the traditional religious structures all played their part in this collective effort.
8. The impact of the transatlantic, Indian Ocean and trans-Saharan slave routes, of the revealed faiths, and of Western colonization, on the organization of African societies and the development of their cultural

and ethical values has been particularly strong. It has often led to a debasement of the cultural values of Africa, denying their countless influences notably on the cultures and civilizations of Europe, the Americas and the Caribbean, bringing cultural traditions, forms of ingenuity, technical and scientific knowledge, skills and spirituality that are now inseparable, for example, from American and Caribbean culture. Colonization also led to the emergence of nation states, which had the effect, *inter alia*, of dismembering existing, culturally distinct communities, separating education from society and thereby depriving education of its cultural bases, devaluing African indigenous knowledge and languages, and often devaluing Africa itself and its peoples as marginalized and incapable of empowerment.

### A renewed focus

9. Colonization and its aftermath have led to a situation in which education has no longer been able to play one of its primary roles of social integration. The emphasis had shifted to education underlain by a foreign culture and the acquisition of the skills needed for paid employment, especially in the formal sector of the economy, although with a very limited number of opportunities. Post-colonial educational reforms in Africa were originally intended to right this wrong and to evolve national educational systems that would capitalize on cultural dimensions and use their core values as a solid stepping stone for opening up to a wider world, while adhering to their own distinct cultural identities. Pressures, both external and internal, for economics- and technology-driven development have tended to reduce the importance of cultural values in education and emphasize expansion to meet growing social demand, as well as quality, relevance, efficiency, and equity.
10. Concern for Africa's cultural regeneration has also been an integral aspect of post-independence nation-building on the continent, with a recognition of the need to harness the cultural resources of Africa to enrich the process of education, requiring the creation of an enabling environment in a number of ways. In recent times, the call for a much greater emphasis on the cultural dimension in all aspects of development has become increasingly vocal, particularly in situations of post-conflict.
11. To strengthen the social inclusion and participation of the majority of Africa's peoples in society's development and in Africa's inclusion in the wider world, as envisaged by NEPAD, is a challenge for both education and culture. To reap the assumed benefits of globalization, and to be a contributor to (and no longer a marginal beneficiary and consumer of) world progress, Africa needs its own critical mass of persons who have

mastered the skills needed for success. Getting education to reach the unreached in Africa, women and girls first and foremost, is an urgent task, as uneducated citizens with limited skills cannot develop the region. Excluding the bulk of the people from cultural inspiration, benefit and participation does not aid the sustainable development of the continent either.

12. The AU's new vision of the African Renaissance and enhanced regional integration, including through NEPAD, is an opportunity to reinforce the work already done by African States, which have worked both independently and through regional and international structures, institutions and ministerial conferences to tackle these issues. The continent's development goals, particularly the region's concern for its rightful place in the emerging knowledge societies of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, have been well articulated in a number of fora and are reflected in commitments to continental and international development goals and initiatives<sup>2</sup>, as well as in high-level policy statements by African leaders.

### **Recommendations within the context of regional integration**

13. Many bridges and linkages between education and culture already exist – implicitly and explicitly – and are doubtless to be found in many African countries. Successful regional integration is the result of inextricably combining the aspirations of people (bottom-up) with a visionary, shared political will of leaders (top-down) to be expressed by the African Union through a number of commitments to be assumed by all Member States. The complexity of the endeavour requires a pragmatic and gradual approach vis-à-vis the priorities to be addressed jointly and their translation into realistic, feasible measures to be applied both on the regional and subregional levels through Africa's intergovernmental machinery, as well as on the national level.
14. The following points are envisioned as broad-brush but concrete thrusts of action to which the top African leadership might wish to commit with

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<sup>2</sup> For example, on the African regional level: African Renaissance, Lagos Plan of Action, NEPAD, Decade of Education in Africa, African Culture Charter, OAU/UNESCO Dakar Plan of Action for Cultural Industries, 7<sup>th</sup> Regional Conference on Women (Beijing + 10), Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights (ACHPR) on the Rights of Women, First Conference of Intellectuals of Africa and the Diaspora; on the international level: MDGs, EFA, World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), United Nations Literacy Decade (UNLD), United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (UNDESD), Conference on Cultural Policies for Development, International Decade for Culture and Development; on the UNESCO level: MINEDAF VIII, Dar-es-Salaam 2002; Abidjan Culture for Development Workshop, etc.

a view to enhancing the process of regional integration under way in the specific area covered by the “education-culture interface”, underpinned by an agreement to follow up through the continental and subregional intergovernmental machinery of Africa.

15. Commitments of this nature can in no way substitute for significant practical action in the specific areas of culture and education. The suggested overall commitments would need to be complemented by a set of substantive action lines for governmental and societal action – notably on the national level – designed to assist, and to be fully built into, ongoing regional and subregional integration efforts, particularly in the overall framework of NEPAD. A proposed outline for such possible actions is submitted separately in the form of sectoral recommendations for both the education and the culture spheres.

## Commitments

- 1. To recognize the linkages between education and culture as key ingredients for effective and sustainable development, and to design appropriate policies in educational and cultural fields from this perspective, with a view to shaping Africa's future, including through its own model of knowledge societies.**

*Rationale: Within the context of the MDGs and the EFA goals, as well as the outcome of the Stockholm Conference on Cultural Policies for Development and of the provisions of the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, and without claiming to solve all difficulties, it is proposed that future policies be infused with an awareness that a culturally sensitive view of education, and a thriving, dynamic cultural identity that is rooted in its own values and open to the world, are pre-conditions for societies to develop sustainably and should be the subject of determined engagement both within the intergovernmental machinery of Africa (AU, RECs) and by national governments. It is understood that all commitments hereafter make equitable and appropriate use of both newer and more traditional information and communication technologies. Furthermore, mechanisms could be set up for periodical consultation between education and culture authorities, such as, for example, joint biennial meetings of the executive bodies of the Ministers of Education and of Culture. The African Peer Review Mechanism might also be suitably seized of the question.*

**2. To undertake a major effort towards curriculum and educational systems renewal at the regional and sub-regional levels, including through the development of appropriate teaching and learning materials.**

*Rationale: Such an effort should be underpinned by a dynamic, progressive, culturally sensitive and sustainable view of education in the 21st century and aim to increase efforts towards a common continent-wide set of educational contents in appropriate subject areas, while remaining respectful of pluralism and cultural specificities. For example, the History curriculum could be inspired in UNESCO's History of Africa and include the impact of the African component in the Americas as a result of slave trade and the current role of the diaspora. The Literature curriculum should pay specific attention to African epopees and myths as well as to contemporary African literature created in Africa and by Africans abroad. The Natural sciences and Technology curriculum should use examples inspired in African topography, flora and fauna, natural heritage, etc., and highlight main agricultural productions of the African continent, its own environmental challenges and protection, African traditional knowledge and know-how, and address issues such as disaster awareness and prevention. The Social sciences curriculum should cover African anthropology, study of major African values and beliefs, endogenous conflict resolution systems, democracy and citizenship, and address the relation of the individual and community rights. African current challenges such as development, gender issues, HIV/AIDS and other pandemics, rural versus urban ways of living, brain drain and emigration problems, health care, dietetics, etc. should also find appropriate place in the curriculum. Furthermore, within the overall context of curriculum renewal and the reform of educational systems, fresh efforts should be promoted to construct accreditation, recognition and quality assurance mechanisms that will facilitate mutual recognition of learning and qualifications and thus increase regional and subregional mobility and integration, and reduce educational transaction costs for individuals. All these tasks would benefit from regional and subregional implementation and monitoring.*

**3. To reaffirm the crucial status and social and cultural role of teachers and ensure that investment in teacher training is sensitive to the African cultural agenda.**

*Rationale: Teacher training is a key element for the success of educational reform and should be high on the agenda of continental and subregional cooperation. The status of the teacher in the broad sense of the term should be promoted and restored, including the teacher's role in society, employment conditions, salary levels, etc. In substantive terms, teacher training should be revisited and reinforced since teachers hold particular responsibility in the quality education of future African generations and leaders. The curriculum of teachers' training should be redesigned and include a sound knowledge of Africa and its values, and a global vision of world realities. Provision of training should also draw on ICTs and their potential as well as ensuring, in terms of content, a certain mastery of designing effective and attractive educational radio and multimedia programmes, and appropriate techniques to stimulate pupils' interest in reading and the arts (organizing contests, performances, sport events, etc.). Furthermore, art and media practitioners and craftspeople should be integrated within the educational system in their respective fields of expertise. Because of its important role in knowledge transmission,*

*parental education should not be overlooked; nor should, from the present perspective, in-service re-training of active teachers. Teachers in the diaspora should be turned to for advice, knowledge transmission and innovative forms of personal humanitarian assistance such as sabbaticals, notably in light of the serious shortages resulting from the impact of infectious diseases.*

**4. To consider languages, their use and teaching (mother, national, international) as being of strategic importance for the development of societies, to ensure attention to this issue at the highest policy-making levels, and to identify widely spoken African languages for possible use in the education systems across the continent.**

*Rationale: Languages have complex implications in terms of identity and social integration, both globally and locally, and thus are of strategic importance. They are not only tools of communication, but also, and mainly, systems of perception and thought, mirrors of cultural identity and vectors of its fundamental values. They are an essential constituent of the self-consciousness and identity of individuals and societies, and are the basis for the creation, processing and transmission of knowledge. The capacity of peoples to live in and modify their environment, interact and socialize is heavily dependent on and marked by their language faculty. Thus, marginalization or integration, exclusion or empowerment, poverty or development, are to a certain extent determined by linguistic choices and strategies. Language, and in particular the choice of language instruction in education, becomes therefore a fundamental choice. While there are strong educational arguments in favour of mother tongue (or first language) instruction, a careful balance also needs to be made between enabling people to use local languages in learning, and to providing access to global languages of communication at the national, regional and international levels. While national efforts should therefore concentrate on providing appropriate room for the use of local languages at the first levels of basic education, the progressive introduction of one or more main African languages as well as internationally-used languages should be secured so as to ensure that, at the end of the compulsory education period, African youth can easily communicate with their peers, with other Africans and with the world as a whole. The fact is that, as a medium of learning crucial to the exercising of every form of social skill and professional activity, language plays a central part in building knowledge societies; and the role of the information and communication technologies here, inter alia in the production and distribution of multilingual educational and cultural content, is growing greater by the day. The role of women – particularly mothers, in pre-school contexts – is also of the essence as prime source of transmission of language and heritage.*

**5. To increase awareness and ensure inter-generational ownership of Africa's cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible, through formal and non-formal educational structures and channels, highlighting its potential as a source of creativity and socio-economic development, and promoting the status of men and women of culture in society**

*Rationale: The heritage, in all its forms, testifies to human experience and aspirations. As a shared experience, it reinforces cultural identity while showing the diversity of others.*

*African heritage education can provide African children and young people with the opportunity and contentment of self-discovery and also help establish a genuine dialogue between African cultures, including in the diaspora where a sense of identity loss may be more likely and acute. It is also important to address the status of men and women of culture, and also the contribution of the heritage to the learning and socialization needs of children and young people whose lives have been disrupted (especially orphans, child soldiers, refugees) and who are afflicted by HIV/AIDS, other diseases, war and violent conflict, displacement, marginalization, urbanization, etc. If customary cultural transmission processes and mechanisms do not function effectively, cultural heritage education can become an alternative channel by providing historical ways of transmission of history, values, literature, music, dance, plastic arts, crafts, etc. Whenever possible, it would be advisable to associate traditional story-tellers and include visits to museums, festivals, memorials, archaeological, cultural and natural sites, etc. An overview of major museum collections in Africa and abroad as well as the presentation of major creations of African origins having appeared abroad (e.g. jazz, dance, hip hop, etc.) using illustrated books, videos and music records, could become a useful complement to heritage education, particularly through the added benefits of the ICTs in terms of creation and circulation of "local contents". The development of cultural tourism may have benefits, including the enhancement of linkages between the diaspora and the continent, not only from the economic point of view, but also in terms of preservation and promotion of cultural identity within the diaspora, thus raising the supply of cultural and artistic goods and expressions on a global scale and extending intercultural dialogue.*

## **6. To develop book production and distribution as an essential dimension of promotion of cultural diversity, cultural heritage and a more balanced global cultural offer.**

*Rationale: Currently, African textbooks contain many examples based on foreign cultures. They are often authored by foreign educators and international publishers are virtually the only beneficiaries of international public biddings for school books procurement for Africa. Examples used in textbooks for all subjects, particularly in basic education, should rely on Africa's realities. School books should also be authored by African educators and teams. Without infringing the rules of free competition, a positive discrimination in favour of African publishers of school books should be introduced in recognition of their comparative advantage to adequately interpret the new curriculum and translate it into school books and as a way to help create an enabling environment for the strengthening of African publishing and the development of a reading society. In the same vein, basic collections (school libraries) including, in particular, African reference books and fundamental works related to the overall curriculum should be developed and made accessible to teachers and pupils. Where appropriate space can be provided, school libraries could also develop as community centres and service parents and relatives in out-of-school hours by expanding the collections, providing access to Internet and organizing discussions on topical issues of common interest. Motivated teachers and community leaders following appropriate training could animate such school libraries/community centres. Continent- and subregion-wide initiatives in this regard, also drawing on the advantages of ICTs for networking, should be encouraged, notably through NEPAD.*

**7. To increase involvement of women in Africa's governance, socialization, cultural and conflict-prevention processes and underline the importance of accepting and internalizing this role as a forward-looking and dynamic process, particularly from educational, cultural and sustainable development perspectives.**

*Rationale: Women are often poorly recognized and excluded; yet they perform essential societal roles based on tradition and have a vital place in the building of the societies of the Africa of tomorrow. These issues are addressed notably in the Solemn Declaration on the Equality of Men and Women in Africa adopted at the Third AU Summit in July 2004, as well as in the outcomes of the recent 7<sup>th</sup> Regional Conference on Women (October 2004), whose plan of action addresses the question of education in specific, action-oriented terms. These commitments are reflected in the education recommendations attached as a complement to this paper. While addressing and recognizing the gender issue runs implicitly through the entirety of the proposed commitments in this paper, this specific commitment is designed to reflect the special emphasis required on the role of women and their just quest for equality in designing the culturally-sensitive and equity-conscious African societies set out as goals in numerous commitments and undertakings of African leaders over recent years.*

**8. To encourage the greater involvement of the diaspora in all aspects of Africa's development, notably through making greater use of its special experience in the education-culture interface.**

*Rationale: While reference to the role of the diaspora is to be found in many of the commitments above, it is worth underlining that there are two-way benefits to be had from an enhancement of the diaspora's involvement in African development, and that the education-culture interface is an area of particular promise in this regard, demonstrating clearly that the diaspora's importance to African development is far from being just about economics. Members of the diaspora could benefit from a greater sense of belonging and solidarity and from a sharper cultural identity. In turn, they have special expertise to offer to the continent, not only on the coupling of foreign education, work and living experiences with the retention of their cultural identity, but on how those experiences can be turned to account as Africa designs its own form of modernity and forward-looking development, taking the best from experiences and models elsewhere, whilst keeping the best of that which it already has.*

**9. Acknowledge and promote the involvement of all parts of society, particularly civil society organizations (CSOs) in the appropriation of Africa's development goals and processes notably through the advantages of greater education-culture interaction**

*Rationale: A substantial proportion of cultural and social (and in fact educational) innovative community development efforts taking place in Africa is undertaken by civil society organizations. Since culture really belongs to the people, and since Africa Renaissance and the AU/NEPAD programme both stress the role of the people in*

*Africa's sustainable development, it would be worthwhile fully to mobilize and involve civil society groups in all actions aimed at promoting the ideals of culture/education in development. It would also be worthwhile for regional sub-regional, national and sub-national bodies in Africa to contribute to strengthening the capacity of civil society organizations, to enable them to contribute more effectively to evolving a culture conscious society that can in its turn help with the evolution of a learning/knowledge society in Africa.*

## Contributions of UNESCO and other partnerships

16. UNESCO on its part reaffirms its strong cooperation with AU in pursuing developmental goals. Africa is a region of prime priority to UNESCO and cooperation with OAU/AU has always been one of the main concerns for the Organization. UNESCO has for decades had a cooperation agreement with the OAU/Africa Union, supported by a joint commission that meets every biennium. These cooperation arrangements could be the subject of review with a view to reinforcing mutual engagement and impact. The AU and UNESCO have also strengthened their partnership through various modalities and mechanisms over the years, particularly in the organization of regional and sub-regional ministerial conferences and consultations. A good number of pan-African institutions and NGOs in the domain of Culture-Education are in direct working relationships with UNESCO.
17. Since its inception in 2001, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) has found strong support within UNESCO. Indeed, well before the adoption by the United Nations General Assembly of its Declaration on NEPAD in September 2002, by which it invited the international community and the UN System to consider the Initiative as the new framework for their support to Africa's development, UNESCO had already moved steadily in that direction, organizing, *inter alia*, an International Seminar on the theme "Forward-looking Approaches and Innovative Strategies to promote the development of Africa in the Twenty-first Century" in Paris on 8 and 9 November 2001.
18. UNESCO devoted its Medium-Term Strategy (2002-2007) for the Africa region to the theme "Contributing to peace and human development in an era of globalization through education, the sciences, culture and communication". The document, which was prepared in close consultation with African Member States, has incorporated the NEPAD priorities and objectives and serves as a guide for their implementation. In the same vein, it should be noted that with a view to better reflecting

AU/NEPAD objectives in the Strategy for the biennium 2004-2005, UNESCO organized a seminar in March 2003 in Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso) on the theme “UNESCO-NEPAD: From Vision to Action” in order to specify ways and means of applying the NEPAD plan of action in the Organization’s fields of competence. One of the major outcomes of this seminar was the **recognition of the key importance to be attached to education and culture** if the sustainable development of the continent is truly to be secured.

19. The Director-General of UNESCO has taken two important initiatives with a view to increasing and improving the Organization’s support to the implementation of the AU’s programme NEPAD. The first one is the establishment of a “UNESCO Committee for NEPAD” and the other relates to the setting up of a “Forum of Sub-Regional and Regional Organizations for the support of cooperation between UNESCO and NEPAD”. The Committee’s consultative role is to monitor the strategies, programmes and activities carried out by the Organization in the implementation of NEPAD and to make recommendations and give advice to the Director-General on the sustainable development of Africa in general, and on the support which UNESCO should provide, within its fields of competence, to NEPAD. FOSRASUN, for its part, has been conceived as an instrument for cooperation between the RECs, African Union/NEPAD and UNESCO, facilitating consultation, dialogue and the exchange of views and experiences at the regional and sub-regional levels in order to identify the best approaches to promoting human resource capacity around common points of interest that favour regional integration.
20. UNESCO is prepared to contribute through its own resources and through its network of cooperating institutions/organizations in Africa and elsewhere to accompany the AU in these efforts. This contribution could take the form, for example, of regional, sub-regional, and national Ministerial conferences and consultations that bring together the key twin sectors of Culture and Education; strengthening pan-African, sub-regional, and national institutions working in the areas of concern to this document; assisting Member States in further articulating the Culture-Education nexus in their national development efforts; reinforcing the capacity of centres of excellence in tertiary institutions carrying out research in the culture-education interface, and facilitating the publication and dissemination of research results, experiments and worthwhile practices.

21. As per their charter and functions, UNESCO's National Commissions play a unique role. In each African Member State, they are in a key position to help Africans to internalize the principles and objectives of the African Union and NEPAD where these relate to the Organization's fields of competence. Efforts will continue to enable them to fully discharge their role, while expanding their field of action to include the search for funding and the mobilization of new partnerships. UNESCO is one of the only organizations within the UN system to benefit from such a broad based and important "relay".
22. Africa's many international partners (international and regional multilateral agencies such as UN system, World Bank, ADB, EU, and national donor sources such as G-8 Members [*viz.* TICAD, the current UK Commission on Africa, etc.]) should be encouraged by the African Union to engage with its efforts to re-shape its education and culture agendas along the lines developed in this paper.