

UNESCO FORUM ON HIGHER EDUCATION, RESEARCH AND KNOWLEDGE**Research Seminar - Regional Scientific Committee for Africa*****“The Contribution of Higher Education to National Education Systems:
Current Challenges for Africa”***

22 – 24 March 2007

Terms of Reference for Authors**Background**

The UNESCO Forum on Higher Education, Research and Knowledge is a SAREC/SIDA funded project that seeks to promote a wider understanding of systems and structures of higher education, and systems of knowledge creation. The Forum has established a Regional Scientific Committee in each of the five regions of the world. The mandate of each regional committee is to identify critical issues of debate, conceptualise research areas, facilitate the gathering of data from the region, formulate strategies to promote research in the relevant areas and identify research gaps. Each regional committee is also responsible for organising Regional Research Seminars to achieve its objectives.

The Regional Scientific Committee for Africa is planning to organise its next Research seminar in Accra, Ghana, from 22 to 24 March 2007 on the theme “*The Contribution of Higher Education to National Education Systems*”.

Context

It is widely acknowledged that basic education is a right and that it plays a crucial role in promoting social and economic development. Particularly in poor countries, it is emphasis on basic education that is seen as the key to economic growth and poverty reduction.

On the other hand, higher education, which had been conceived as an indispensable instrument of development in Africa in the immediate post-independence years, had by the late 1980s come to be accorded much less priority by leading international agencies, donor countries and some African governments. The result, in spite of resistance by constituencies important within the higher education community, was the relative neglect of Africa’s universities and higher education institutions. Recent years have seen a reversal of this trend, with increasing acknowledgement of the critical contribution that higher education could, and ought to make to Africa’s social development and economic growth.

Within the education sector, higher education has an important role to play in promoting and sustaining primary, secondary, technical and vocational education, as well as other systems of national education. Indeed, higher education in Africa can make a significant contribution in achieving the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDG’s) as well as the Education for All (EFA) targets.

The Seminar aims at looking at the linkages between higher education and other national education systems; whether such linkages exist and if so, how effective they are; if not, how they can be established. It also aims at examining whether higher education institutions are aware of the MDG's and the EFA targets or consider them as any part of their responsibility; whether they adopt a targeted approach in achieving these goals and, if not, how they can be sensitised to the importance of their involvement and be encouraged to participate; and whether the three core functions of higher education (teaching, research and community service) have changed as a result of the interaction of higher education with other levels of education in the country, e.g. new qualifications developed or new research themes pursued.

Issues

The main issues that the Seminar proposes to examine are indicated below. There are also a number of cross-cutting issues such as democratic cultures, gender equality, ICT's, development and research and knowledge production which are to be addressed as part of the issues listed.

Teacher Education

Undoubtedly a major thrust in promoting education is through teacher training and most higher education institutions are already involved in the process. However, a major challenge facing Africa is providing the very large number of teachers required in both primary and secondary schools, taking into account the high attrition resulting from a variety of factors, including HIV/AIDS. Also, existing teachers have to be re-trained. This is a mammoth task. How are higher education institutions coping with it? Is distance education being resorted to? How effective is this? What steps are being taken to ensure that teacher education is also of quality and, in particular, the curriculum is relevant to local situations?

The promotion of science and technology, crucial for the development of Africa, requires a large number of science teachers. Is the training of science teachers being given sufficient priority? If not, what are the constraints?

Non-Formal Education

One of the targets of EFA is to promote adult literacy, especially for women, and to provide access to basic education to all adults. Are higher education institutions in any way contributing to adult literacy?

Higher education institutions, with their staff's expertise and their large number of students, have an enormous potential for promoting non-formal education through community service. In Africa such a service is particularly valuable in rural areas, poor communities and even among refugees in war-afflicted areas. During the vacation periods and during weekends, staff and students can assist disadvantaged and handicapped

children, as well as adults, in achieving literacy and numeracy skills. Staff of Faculties of Medicine, assisted by their students, can inculcate principles of health, nutrition, sanitation, HIV/AIDS prevention, etc. Are there examples of higher education institutions in Africa which provide non-formal education through community service?

In most African countries there are Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO's) which are active in providing non-formal education to youth and adults with special needs. These NGO's require technical support in staff training, curriculum development and preparation of instructional materials. Do higher education institutions collaborate with NGO's in promoting non-formal education?

Continuing Education

In a world which is rapidly and continuously changing, provision of continuing education to professionals and to those who could not earlier benefit from higher education is a necessity. How effective are higher education institutions in providing continuing education programmes? In many countries private and public institutions run their own continuing education programmes. Do higher education institutions collaborate in the running of these programmes?

Technical and Vocational Education

Technical and vocational education is crucially important for the industrial development of Africa, especially in creating small enterprises in rural areas. What are the links between higher education and those institutions providing technical and vocational education? How can higher education institutions assist in promoting technical and vocational education?

Research in Education

There are so many pedagogical and sociological areas in education that can be researched to inform policy makers and promote the educational targets in a country. Some examples are:

- What should be the language used in educating pre-primary and primary school children?
- What is the best way to assess literacy and numeracy skills?
- What is the best approach to be used in promoting adult literacy? How different are the learning capabilities of children and adults?
- How can educational objectives be met in rural areas, where resources are so scarce?

Are higher education institutions active in undertaking research in educational fields? Are their findings communicated to appropriate stakeholders? How is the research funded?
