

CONFINTEA VI Regional African Preparatory Conference
“The Power of Youth and Adult Learning for Africa’s Development”
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Keynote Speech:

***Building prosperous and fair societies in Africa:
The role of the education and training of young people and
adults in the sustainable and equitable development of
Africa***

Joséphine OUÉDRAOGO
Executive Secretary, ENDA Third World

Your Excellency,
Your Excellencies,
Mr.....
Honourable Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of ENDA Third World I would like to thank the organisers of this important meeting for honouring me with the invitation to give the inaugural address of the CONFINTEA VI Regional African Preparatory Conference.

I greatly appreciated the quality of the welcome I was given and am grateful to you for all the assistance I was given to enable me to attend this regional conference.

I The international context in which the Regional African Conference is being held

As our meeting is opening today, the warning lights of our globalised world seem to have turned red. Indeed, we cannot

ignore the spectacular crisis that is currently shaking the financial foundations of the world economy, nor the food crisis that is causing the spectre of hunger to loom over the poorest of the countries of the South, nor the climate crisis that is causing entire regions to be devastated by extreme weather, and even less we can we dismiss the unprecedented increase in global poverty in spite of the efforts being made to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In this alarming context, we are tempted to think that our theories on the economic and social progress that were supposed to follow on as a matter of course from neo-liberalism are revealing their limitations.

At the same time, we are happy to observe that the crises rocking our world are, on the contrary, reviving the energies of those whose voices had become inaudible.

On the one hand, African authorities have never shown more resolve in their denunciation of the inequitable management and exploitation of the world's natural and productive resources. On the other hand, civil societies have never been as unanimous and united as they are now in calling for peace, justice, security and respect for human rights across the world.

To put it another way, the exacerbation of inequalities is being denounced just as vigorously in the North as it is in the South.

Even the historic phase that the greatest power in the world is currently entering at a political level serves as a reminder to us that no established social order remains unshakable forever.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In a global context such as this we would be guilty of political blindness if we isolated the issue of the education of young

people and adults from the changes that are weakening our classical development concepts and doctrines.

Indeed, how is it that all of the successive agreements, platforms and decades devoted to social development, environmental protection, health and education for all, women's rights, the rights of the child and so on right up to the Declaration on the Millennium Development Goals have failed to curb economic, social and cultural disparities and their virulent repercussions on the poorest populations?

This is why we salute the choice of the introductory theme of this conference, because it brings us back to the question of African development. The theme indeed deals with *the building of prosperous and fair societies in Africa: the role of the education and training of young people and adults in the sustainable and equitable development of Africa*.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Before directly addressing the role of education and training, I think that it is necessary first of all to consider the place that adults and young people occupy in the development of the continent, today and over the next decade.

If we know the place that we must assign to populations in the development paradigm, then education, as well as healthcare, transport and social welfare, will automatically become essential services supporting the fulfilment of the aspirations of these populations for better societies.

II The context of economic crisis and increasing poverty requires us to revisit the basics of development in order to seek new foundation stones for education and schooling

The development model or "modern civilisation" put forward by national sector-wide policies, as well as by aid and cooperation programmes, major industrial investments, city and hydro-agricultural planning, mining and all the schooling and

education systems that accompany the model, have succeeded in providing a solid and sometimes even prosperous economic and social basis for 20% of Africans. This fringe of our population, to which those of us here today belong, quite naturally identifies itself with modern civilisation with its modes of consumption, production and operation as well as its modes of governance, conveyed and reproduced by all the products and services of modern culture that is generated by industrialisation.

This modern culture is increasingly becoming the benchmark for a kind of “universal culture” which African states are buying into without asking too many questions.

Yet the content, approaches and moral benchmarks implicitly transcribed into our national development policies and promoted by our formal and non-formal education systems constantly make us revert to being a highly elitist civilisation and therefore, of necessity, one which is a source of inequalities.

In spite of the efforts made and the positive and not insignificant economic and social progress witnessed in many countries, according to international indicators, the path to development is continuing to generate more poverty, recurring armed conflicts, political instability, exclusion and violence of all kinds within our societies.

The hundreds of young adults, men and women who run aground every day in makeshift canoes on the borders of Europe remind us that there is a deep-seated malaise within our populations, for the young adults seeking pastures greener are not all illiterate, are not dying of hunger and do not live on the streets of their villages.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Why are objectives as fundamental as universal access to education, primary healthcare and food security being accomplished so slowly at the pan-African level?

The insecurity of national resources, the reduction of official development aid, the lack of means of support, and the concentration of investments and staff in cities to the detriment of rural areas are of course some of the factors that limit the impact of government support for education.

However, I believe that in addition to these objective and easily identified factors, there are other factors of a philosophical and moral nature.

Among the latter I could mention the way we look at populations and the place and role that they have been confined to by the vertical and technocratic approach that our development model applies to our societies.

Even when grassroots communities are asked to participate in the development and implementation of an education or economic project, everything has already been decided in terms of goals, duration, financing and methodologies by the initiators, if not to say the “owners” of the project or programme, whether it be local or national.

In reality, the “development” that we have offered to children and adults for five decades, in which education and schooling have always occupied a respectable place, has proven to be a finished product in which their aspirations, their values, their innate talents and their standards find no room for spontaneous expression or enhancement.

If it is true that the immutable ethic stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is supposed to constitute the moral foundation for the building of modern civilisation that we call development, then in our relations with populations, in the education sector as well as in other sectors, we must build with

them the bridges that will enable them to draw on their identities and their endogenous resources to participate in the building of this universal civilisation.

Today we agree that the progress expected of our development policies is being compromised because, despite our efforts, the model we are following has been stripped of its original moral meaning.

This is why its impact has been very favourable for only 20% to 30% of society while 70% are gaining no comfort, guidance, security, or even dignity from this model.

Chapter 9 of the *Education for All Global Monitoring Report* states “that a literacy policy should have not only the goal of creating literate individuals but also the much broader goal of creating literate societies in which all people can use their literacy to seek freedoms, opportunities and personal development and in which literacy contributes to the development of the economy and society.”

I would add that the search for freedom and new opportunities for personal development can and should precede literacy. A person who is enrolled in school or who is literate will seek his freedom and personal development wherever he believes it is to be found according to the material references that were communicated to him by our current development model through formal or informal education. It is generally to the cities and countries of the North that such a person will go to seek his place.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I find it difficult to imagine a society of freedoms and economic and social development that does not result from a common vision and is the product of an alliance between the State and all the local actors that populations are made up of.

This common vision, the driving force for the changes that the State proposes to apply in partnership with populations, will result from shared aspirations and expectations and in addition will clarify the roles and responsibilities of every social and economic category. In my opinion, the stability of the development models constructed by industrialised countries arose from collective aspirations for better living standards, for greater justice and equality as well as from alliances that were often difficult and opportunistic but essential between State and non-State actors to define material standards, common priorities and modes of governance which the various social strata identified with to a greater or lesser degree.

I believe that the social movements and even the conflicts that spring up in our countries form part of the expression of these collective aspirations.

The societal change or sustained development that will emerge from these occasionally antagonistic processes will be the product of an irreversible civic awareness that no sector-wide programme or any bilateral or multilateral partnership will ever be able to achieve.

Thus, the education and training of children and adults will become the vehicles for a change desired by all, and will contribute to a blossoming of *self-esteem* that will lead every adult to feel like a stakeholder in a genuine development process.

Education and access to basic services and infrastructures will take their place alongside other strategic priorities such as productive investments that generate employment and the democratic management of the goods and services that arise out of them.

In this new order it will then be possible to hope for a reduction of poverty and inequality because it will give rise to a new process driven and borne along from within, that favourably

receives what comes from the outside with a critical mind, either to improve it or to reject it if it should be contrary to the internal process.

Our political development history has seen positive experiences that have brought aspirations and resources promoted from within, in countries that have had leaders capable of generating an internally-driven process.

The question we ask ourselves today at this Conference is the following:

III How can education become the focus for people's aspirations for sustainable and equitable development?

My aim is not to discredit all the progress already accomplished by States in implementing their national adult education policies. Rather, I pay tribute to the efforts made and the wealth of innovative experiences that have made it possible to move forward in such a difficult context marked by the precariousness of national resources in the face of a vast number of priorities.

I pay tribute to the commitment and determination of teachers, trainers and project and service managers, since it is to them that we owe the various impacts that offer so much hope to young people and adults whose lives would otherwise be without prospects on such a troubled continent.

The proposals that I would like to make before closing my address deal with the political and social force taken on by any education programme.

The level of civic awareness and the living conditions of the population of a given country are to a great extent a reflection of its formal or informal education policy and programmes.

The experience gained by ENDA Third World in the field of education through street-corner schools and adult literacy training in shanty towns was founded on its vision of the

potential that a child and a man or woman represents for the development of his or her society.

ENDA's premise was that no society can prosper, in terms of the growth of its economic and social resources, along the path to greater justice guaranteeing the dignity of all unless every member of the society is considered both as a driving force and as a beneficiary of shared prosperity.

This premise assumes that our relationship with the adult and the child referred to as "poor" quite naturally calls for dialogue in which their participation, imagination and aspirations have as much value and weight as our own.

It is on the basis of this approach that ENDA has always regarded poverty not as a state of material deficiency, but rather as the result of economic, political and social systems that produce and reproduce incapacities and blockages within populations. *It is not the populations who are poor: it is our development systems that create cultural, political and economic impoverishment among the majority of populations.*

Where ENDA has succeeded in giving children, young people and adults from shanty-towns moral and political confidence, these groups of people have fulfilled their intellectual potential. This approach has produced not only craftspeople who earn a decent living, but also academics, engineers, computer specialists, artists and political leaders.

Finally, to conclude, I would say that in addition to learning to read, write, count and work, our populations have more than ever before a need for self-confidence to be achieved through educational solutions that give pride of place to their dreams and their professional, civic and political aspirations.

Thank you for your kind attention.