

IAU Experts Seminar

**Higher Education and Education for All: the Case for Two Solitudes?**

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Welcome Speech by

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On behalf of the International Association of Universities, and on my own behalf, I have great pleasure in welcoming you all to this Seminar on Higher Education and Education for All. The IAU is particularly pleased that this activity is being hosted by the University of Eduardo Mondlane, a long-standing member of the IAU, and I wish to thank the Rector for his support and collaboration, and also for the very warm welcome we have received. I also wish to express our gratitude to you, Honourable Minister, for honouring us with your presence this morning. We realise what a busy schedule you must have and by kindly accepting to be with us, you send a strong signal of the importance of Education For All for your country, for Africa and indeed for the world.

For those of you who may not be fully aware of the IAU and its activities, allow me first to say a few words about our Association. The IAU, which came into existence in 1950, is a UNESCO-based international non-governmental organisation. Its main objective is to bring together higher education institutions and organisations, from countries in every region of the world, for debate, reflection and action on issues of common concern. As a co-operation and service-oriented organisation, it promotes international networking among higher education institutions to facilitate the exchange of information, experience and ideas, and through meetings and research, it contributes to informed higher education policy debate. The IAU has over 600 higher education institutions in about 150 countries as members. In addition, its membership includes 25 national, regional or international higher education associations. This means that, directly and indirectly, the IAU represents over 2,500 of the world's higher education institutions.

In recent years the IAU has been closely following the development of the Dakar Framework for Action on Education for All and reflecting on ways in which higher education can contribute to achieve the prescribed goals. In November 2004 the IAU took an active part in the international meeting organised by UNESCO in Paris on “University Community and EFA”. That meeting recognised the responsibility that universities have towards development and progress in society and the diverse situations to which they must respond in order to engender desirable changes. A year later, the IAU started formulating a pilot project to examine the ways in which higher education and research contribute to meeting EFA goals, a project which SIDA/SAREC subsequently agreed to fund for a three year period. The activities undertaken so far and the findings will be presented to you at this seminar. In May 2006 the IAU participated in a Round Table meeting held in Bergen, Norway, to look at the role of higher education in achieving the EFA goals and where the framework of IAU’s pilot project was presented.

In embarking on a project linking higher education to Education for All, IAU acknowledges the important role that universities must play in serving their societies. In fact, IAU has always recognised that higher education institutions must engage with society. A decade ago, in 1997, in one of its policy statements, IAU advocated the elaboration of a new social contract between university and society. Even earlier than that, in 1993, the same principle guided the IAU when it identified sustainable development as one of its priority themes – a theme which it continued to pursue up to this day, and the highlight of which was an international conference on higher education and sustainable development held in Prague in the Czech Republic in 2003.

Last year, the IAU reviewed the priority themes for its activities for the next few years and in undertaking that review, it took into account not only UNESCO’s priority areas of work but also the major issues facing humanity where higher education can make an important contribution. One of the three identified priority themes is Higher Education and Society, under which appear both sustainable development and how higher education can meet the Education for All goals. The IAU believes that Education For All should be looked at holistically, together with the other major international challenges such as sustainable development and achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Indeed, one of the themes under consideration for IAU’s next General

Conference to be held in Utrecht in 2008, is the role of higher education in achieving the MDG's.

This seminar, bringing together experts working in the field of EFA, is an important milestone in IAU's work in the area of EFA. Participants will get an opportunity to contribute to the conclusions of the pilot project and, more importantly, to participate in the discussion on the follow-up to the project. At the same time we shall have the privilege of learning about the successful activities undertaken by the participants in their respective institutions and being informed about the important north-south collaborative ventures that have taken place.

Allow me to apprise you of a seminar on a similar topic to be held in a couple of months' time. The Africa Scientific Committee of the UNESCO Forum on Higher Education, Research and Knowledge is organising its second research seminar on the theme "The Contribution of Higher Education to National Education Systems" in Accra, Ghana in March 2007, and it will be hosted by the Association of African Universities. The seminar aims at not only looking at how higher education relates to non-formal education, continuing education and technical and vocational education, but also whether institutions are aware of the EFA goals and the MDG's, and whether they consider these as part of their responsibility and adopt a targeted approach in achieving the goals. Some 15-20 research papers will be presented and a selection of these will either be published as a book or as UNESCO Forum's occasional papers. I should add that the IAU will present the findings of its pilot project as well as the outcome of this seminar at the Accra Seminar.

In looking at the various commendable efforts being undertaken to promote EFA, I believe it is equally imperative that we look at some of the major obstacles preventing the achievement of the goals. Let me highlight three of them in the hope that these could be brought up and discussed during the seminar. In selecting the obstacles I have been guided by the fact that they all have a direct effect on higher education's ability to contribute to EFA.

First, the use of information and communication technologies. One of the pledges made by the international community in 2000 within the Dakar Framework for Action was

*“to harness new information and communication technologies to help achieve EFA goals”*. But what is the situation of ICT infrastructure in developing countries, where achieving EFA is so crucially important? The following statistics speak for themselves. In 2005, the number of Personal Computers per 100 inhabitants was 2.2 for Africa compared to 6.5 for Asia and 30.2 for Europe. The number of internet users per 100 inhabitants was 3.7 for Africa, 9.8 for Asia and 30.2 for Europe. In fact the entire African continent had fewer internet users than France alone. And the figures for Sub-Saharan Africa are much worse than for Africa as a whole. International internet bandwidth availability and its high cost in developing countries are other constraints. The importance of ICT in achieving EFA goals can be gauged from just one example - that of training teachers. A simple back-of-the-envelope calculation can show that because of the acute shortage of teachers in developing countries at present, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa, it would be virtually impossible to train the millions of teachers required using conventional means. It is only through the use of ICT that the targets of producing large numbers of quality teachers can be achieved. Two questions arise: are the efforts currently being made to improve ICT infrastructure in developing countries sufficient? Is the north-south digital divide really being bridged?

The second obstacle is HIV/AIDS. Yet another pledge made at Dakar was to *“implement as a matter of urgency education programmes and actions to combat the HIV/AIDS pandemic”*. The latest available statistics on HIV/AIDS are disturbing. In 2006, nearly 25 million people were living with HIV/AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa, of whom nearly 3 million were newly-infected, mostly young people. Just over 2 million Africans died of HIV/AIDS in 2006. There are millions of Africans in immediate need of life-saving AIDS drugs, but only a fraction of them receive these. The battle against AIDS has clearly not yet been won in Africa. And there are indications that the situation is worsening in South-East Asian countries. The seriousness of HIV/AIDS is that it attacks all the key actors promoting EFA – the higher education institutions producing the teachers, the schools because of teacher absenteeism and deaths, the children who are unable to attend school either because they are sick, or their parents are sick or they have been orphaned. The question we need to ask is: because of AIDS, can the EFA goals be really met by 2015 in some of the worst affected areas?

The third obstacle is conflict and disasters. The pledge made at Dakar was to “*meet the needs of education systems affected by conflict, natural calamities and instability...*”. The statistics are again frightening. There are about 16 million refugees, 25 million internally displaced persons fleeing conflicts and disasters, and some 10 million people who have returned to their homes but have to rebuild their lives all over again. Together they represent about 1% of the world’s population. In many cases the schools have disappeared together with the higher education institutions, such as in Indonesia after the tsunami. In other cases a large number of the academics in the higher education institutions have either fled the country or have been killed, as in Iraq. In such areas and conditions, to meet even a semblance of the education needs of the population would be a mammoth task. Meeting the EFA goals would seem impossible.

But I do not want to end my address on a note of gloom and doom. There are many very successful initiatives that have been taken in achieving the EFA goals and positive results have already been recorded. The most significant outcome of the Dakar Framework of Action is that it has sensitised and mobilised the international community to the importance of education at all levels, and has given rise to genuine north-south and south-south cooperation, which augers well for the whole education sector.

Before ending I wish, on behalf of the IAU, to thank SIDA/SAREC for funding the IAU’s pilot project, including the holding of this seminar. Our thanks also go to all of you participants who have supported the project and agreed to share your experiences with us at this seminar. I wish you all successful deliberations and look forward to your views and suggestions for taking the project forward.

Thank you.

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