

Introduction to the Three Triennale Sub-Themes

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The 2012 Triennale: education and training systems supporting the sustainable development of Africa

The aim of the 2012 ADEA Triennale is to promote critical knowledge, skills and qualifications that can meet the challenge of the sustainable development of Africa and, in that context, to rally all political, economic and social leaders around the need to design and build effective, relevant education and training systems. The process of preparation for the Triennale, initiated by ADEA, has produced analytical and policy documents that are all aimed at creating a strong dynamic of consultation and cooperation among all the national, sub-regional and regional stakeholders concerned, as well as between these stakeholders and multilateral or bilateral international organizations. The goal is to make the Ougadougou Triennale (12-17 February 2012) an event that will have a decisive impact on the construction of a realistic future for the entire continent. To this end, it is necessary to build an African society based on the knowledge, skills and qualifications of its working population and all of its members.

The preparations for the Triennale are based on a general concept note that defines the overall analytical framework for this preparatory process. The process is structured according to three sub-theme concept notes that extend the overall theme of the general note to issues that are specific to the various education and training tracks. Lastly, the process includes consultations aimed at eliciting the participation of private-sector education and training providers, civil society and young people in the deliberations on the best way to mobilize human resources to drive the sustainable development of all countries in Africa.

Key concepts and paradigm shifts of the Triennale

The theme selected for the Triennale is formulated as follows: “Promoting critical knowledge, skills and qualifications for the sustainable development of Africa: how to design and build an effective response by education and training systems?” This formulation is based on three pillars:

- a realistic vision of Africa’s future;
- achievement of this vision through the promotion of new education and training policies and strategies aimed at responding effectively to economic, social and cultural demand;
- provision of diversified, integrated education and training pathways and programs that can initiate and develop the critical skills required for lifelong learning.

Key concepts of the Triennale

The main thrusts of our thinking and action are based on a number of key concepts whose distinctive feature is that they reflect recent developments in education and training systems while at the same time placing them in a process of transformation of these systems. These key concepts connect the various definitions of skill to that of sustainable development, through the notions of efficiency and effectiveness. They may be summed up as follows.

The concept of skill

This concept is central to the theme of the Triennale. Skill is defined as “combinatory knowledge that uses and integrates theoretical, procedural and environmental knowledge, know-how and life skills to resolve problems, make decisions, carry out plans, etc.” This definition, which comes from organization theory, places education and training attainment within a process of initiative, assumption of responsibility and intelligence in action. The aim is to educate and train individual, business and social stakeholders who promote a can-do attitude and a spirit of initiative. The concept of critical skills adds a dimension of urgency and anticipation to this definition: it calls on us to produce knowledge and know-how that ensure the survival of society and the development of current economic activities and promote the emergence of the occupations and sectors that represent the future of African countries and the continent as a whole.

The concept of sustainable development

The concept of sustainable development underpins the entire process of preparation for the Triennale. It gives added richness to the various meanings of the concept of skill, in that it orients them toward a multidimensional development process focused on:

- protection and preservation of the environment, and particularly the combat against climate change;
- promotion of a model of sustainable economic growth based on rational use and preservation of natural resources;
- the construction of inclusive societies based on fighting effectively against poverty and all forms of discrimination and marginalization;
- strengthening of mutual knowledge and mutual cultural and human understanding between groups, societies and peoples, as a path to solidarity and peace.

The concept of lifelong learning

The theme of the Triennale redefines the concept of basic education by broadening it to include the opportunity, for any young person or adult, to acquire the key skills constituting the theoretical and practical foundation that is essential for lifelong learning. This means that learning approaches and pathways must be reorganized to enable all people to learn what the world is today and what it will become tomorrow. This in turn requires the promotion of a culture and environment of holistic, open learning that serves all people, where learners have access to all forms of knowledge, but also accept to share it and develop it in common.

The concept of effective responses to challenges

The focus on sustainable development means that education and training systems must be assessed not solely on their capacity to admit the many young people in need of education and training, but also, and most importantly, on the ability to educate and train them with an eye to sustainable development. The first step is to enhance the internal efficiency of such systems, that is, the extent to which they optimize the quality of learning and thereby the quality of the skills developed. Quality is indispensable if beneficiaries are to acquire knowledge, know-how and life skills that are long-lasting and applicable to real-life situations. The second step is to improve their external efficiency, that is, the relevance of what is learned. The notion of relevance covers not only the economic and social integration of young people and adults but also their social inclusion and their acquisition of

the cultural, human and social values needed to promote mutual understanding, solidarity and peace among groups, societies and peoples.

The paradigm shifts of the Triennale

The 2008 Biennale in Maputo validated the paradigm shift consisting of the integration of formal, non-formal and informal pathways to knowledge and skill acquisition into an integrated, coherent education and training system. The 2012 Triennale continues the work begun at Maputo and underscores the importance of the further changes to be made to design and build education and training systems that can face the current and future challenges of sustainable development.

Education and training systems focused on the relevance and effectiveness of learning

The general aim here is to link education and training to a plan for social change and, to this end, to train highly qualified citizens, workers and resource persons capable of bringing about the economic, social, cultural and political transformations required for sustainable development. Such development requires countries to raise labor productivity, to achieve economic growth rates compatible with environmental protection and preservation, and to develop economies and societies based on the knowledge they need to participate in the globalization process and a development process marked by solidarity among countries and continents.

More specifically, the aim is to bring about paradigm shifts in the dynamics and functioning of education and training systems. Among other things, this means shifting:

- from a paradigm of instruction to a paradigm of learning;
- from a paradigm based on diplomas to one of acquiring skills that can be employed to promote sustainable development;
- from a supply-driven to a demand-driven approach;
- from a budgetary logic to a logic of cost-effectiveness;
- from an institutional management logic to a partnership management logic;
- from a sectoral approach to problems to a multisectoral approach.

The Triennale should help us to identify and analyze the reforms and innovations in progress that successfully negotiate these shifts of logic or paradigm and to learn from their success so as to initiate a continent-wide process of education and training for sustainable development.

Re-engineering the development of basic skills, technical and vocational skills, and scientific and technological skills

The three sub-themes selected as frameworks for thought, analysis and contributions for all those involved in the preparations for the Triennale draw on the most recent results of current research and experimentation to propose a new vision of the entire education and training field.

Sub-theme 1: Common core skills for lifelong learning and sustainable development in Africa

This sub-theme takes a fresh approach to basic education by squarely raising the issue of the common core of skills that not only pupils in the school system, but also young people and adults out of formal education, need to acquire in order to enter the process of lifelong learning. Access to this common core should be a right enjoyed by all. This requires departing from formal basic

education and its temporal framework, and establishing as many non-formal and informal pathways as possible, so as to enable those with insufficient education and training to acquire the cognitive, social, interpersonal, practical and other skills they need to take control of their person, social and working lives.

The concept note for the sub-theme analyzes the various types of skills that should be included in the common core.

- Written and oral communication skills: a strong association exists between literacy and the ability to communicate and learn in one's mother tongue prior to learning any official language.
- Basic cognitive skills: education should depart from lecture-style instruction and seek to develop the ability to question, reason, understand, analyze and experiment. In particular, it should develop a faculty for critical thinking, which is conspicuously absent from the curricula now in place.
- Skills related to personal development: the aim is to enable young people and adults to meet the challenges of their socioeconomic, political and cultural environment, particularly those related to poverty, health, violence and discrimination in their daily lives.
- Social and civic skills: there can be no sustainable development unless each person can participate in social life, become integrated into it, and adopt the values and attitudes of mutual cultural understanding, solidarity and peace.
- Skills for the workplace: the common core should include basic skills needed to understand the working environment and develop qualities such as autonomy, problem solving, creativity, initiative and responsibility.

The sub-theme therefore defines the challenges that the Triennale will try to address in order to make this common core of skills a good that is truly accessible to all, in a context of lifelong learning. These challenges are numerous and require among other things that education systems be re-engineered at the national and regional levels. It is a matter of defining – for each country and, more generally, at continental level – the essential components of the common core and in particular redefining the pace and timeframes of education so as to make the common core accessible not only in basic education but throughout life. This re-engineering is one of the keys to the sustainable development of Africa. It will require analytical work and consultation prior to the Triennale, focusing on the following points:

1. In concrete terms, how should the formation of this common core of skills be incorporated in national education and training strategies, especially in curricular reforms, and how can special emphasis be given to those connected with sustainable development?
2. How can we involve all educators, parents, local authorities, and the business, crafts and farming sectors in the definition and implementation of the common core of skills and, more broadly, of lifelong education and training?
3. How can we make these skills accessible to groups that are marginalized and discriminated against, and in so doing, enhance social inclusion and equitable access and performance?
4. How can the common core serve, in fragile and post-conflict countries, to develop capacities, values and attitudes that are conducive to solidarity, peace and reconciliation?

The contributions expected as part of the Triennale preparations should make it possible, building on the progress made by various countries and stakeholders, to identify close connections between a common core of skills accessible to all, lifelong learning and sustainable development.

Sub-theme 2: Lifelong technical and vocational skills development for sustainable socio-economic growth in Africa

This sub-theme emphasizes the crucial role of technical and vocational skills development (TVSD) in enabling young people and adults to participate actively in Africa's sustainable development. A skilled working population is a factor of economic growth, wealth creation and hence poverty reduction. With this in mind, many countries have formulated policies and strategies to develop TVSD so as to reach the greatest possible number of young people. However, the concept note on this sub-theme recognizes that there is still a long way to go between identification of skill and training requirements and the implementation of an effective, sustainable TVSD policy at country level and in the continent as a whole.

The sub-theme argues, in such a context, for a holistic, inclusive approach focused on developing the vocational skills of young people and adults throughout their working lives. It emphasizes in particular the importance of avoiding an overly institutional vision of skill acquisition, of pursuing it at any age through a diverse range of pathways that use not only formal but also non-formal and informal means of training and development of job skills. It emphasizes the role of the informal sector in the production of skills for youth and adults, and argues in favor of recognizing skills regardless of how they are acquired.

The development of vocational skills is not limited to mere adaptation to the working world. The sub-theme adopts the perspective of the common core of skills and emphasizes that the skills needed to practice a given trade or occupation must also include cognitive components and the ability to analyze and solve problems, to take initiatives and responsibility – in short, entrepreneurial skills.

Against this background, the sub-theme defines the main challenges that should be addressed in greater depth during the Triennale.

1. Improving governance of TVSD by expanding both the regulatory role of government and partnership-based management of training and vocationalization systems. One of the effects of public-private partnership is to increase opportunities for integration into the workforce while reducing the cost to government.
2. Raising the quality of TVSD. Quality improvement is obtained in particular by the introduction of the skills-based approach (SBA) and the use of information and communication technology. However, this requires a sound basic education, updating and improvement of training content and equipment, and improved training of trainers.
3. Increasing relevance and employability. The aim here is to combat youth unemployment and, to this end, to channel skill acquisition toward the current and future needs of the economy. It is also necessary to monitor the integration of young people into the workforce and to draw conclusions on how to make them more employable.
4. Evaluating and certifying skills. The development of lifelong learning and the inclusion of non-formal and informal training tracks require the establishment of national certification

frameworks or more flexible mechanisms for recognition of the qualifications acquired on completion of a training or vocationalization track.

5. Recognizing skills developed by the informal sector. In sub-Saharan Africa, the bulk of the working population is trained by the informal sector. Although the methods used are traditional and need to be improved, informal providers' use of new technologies is promising and indicates that they should be supported.
6. Making TVSD more accessible and attractive. As a result of the overly negative image of vocational training, access to this sector is limited or considered to be a second-rate solution, or even as failure. But the fact is that TVSD has high potential to increase the qualifications and employment of young people and to end the exclusion from the education and training system of the most vulnerable groups, who seek employment and social inclusion.

Sub-theme 3: Lifelong Acquisition of Scientific and Technological Knowledge and Skills for Africa's Sustainable Development in a globalized world

The development of a higher education system focused on the development of scientific and technical skills is a particularly strategic issue for Africa, because the continent is marked by highly fragile institutions; the marginalization of its economy with respect to the world economy; a young population looking for jobs, social inclusion, health and peace; and a lack of attractiveness for external investment. Given this context, the sub-theme adopts the hypothesis that developing a high level of skills and knowledge is an effective means of improving both the daily lives of Africans and Africa's place in the world economy.

Africa's positioning in the context of globalization indicates that the continent has the potential to build its future on its abundant natural resources. These resources are substantially under-exploited, however, owing to a lack of scientific and technological investment in the processing of this wealth into high value-added products. Analysis of research and development budgets shows that Africa allocates far less to this than countries such as China, India, Malaysia and the Republic of Korea. All of these countries invest heavily in technological development through higher education, training up to 50% of their youth in the tertiary system, whereas Africa admits on average only 5% of a given age group. Moreover, these countries train and support their scientific community by providing attractive conditions and incentives for research, which Africa does not have.

Under these circumstances, Africa must adopt a proactive policy of scientific and technological development.

1. Close links should be established between universities and private-sector firms in order to encourage the productive sector to make take advantage of new knowledge and scientific and technological innovations.
2. Africa, like the United States and Europe, should encourage the international mobility of tertiary students in order to create a common qualification area that will benefit the entire region.
3. The substantial increase in the intake capacity of public and private universities in recent years should be continued. However, this increase should be channeled toward the production of highly qualified human resources and should generate innovation capacities

and scientific and technical knowledge that are relevant to the economic development potential of African countries, and particularly their potential for sustainable development.

4. The development of higher education should also emphasize skills acquired as regard technological innovation in the business world, create linkages between the various institutions that train young people in scientific and technical fields, and establish as many partnerships as possible between the higher education sector and private-sector firms.
5. Lastly, Africa should invest in excellence of training and research and make the results available to socio-economic stakeholders in order to increase their potential for creation of wealth and value added.

Conclusion: involving all education and training stakeholders in the preparations for the Triennale

The lines of thought, analysis and consultation raised by the overall theme and the three sub-themes of the Triennale will give rise to many contributions that will enrich the debate among countries, development agencies, and education and training stakeholders. In particular, there are plans to organize regional consultations with representatives of the private sector, civil society and youth in order to involve them directly in the design and construction of education and training systems capable of meeting the challenges of Africa's sustainable development.

All education and training managers and stakeholders are welcome to participate in the Triennale preparation process. The success of this process will depend on the engagement of these managers and stakeholders at the national, sub-regional and regional levels as well as in the many international organizations that support and finance policies and mechanisms to develop knowledge, skills and qualifications. It will also be a success if the consultations with the private sector, civil society, youth and members of the African diaspora help to inform the ideas and proposals stemming from the various studies and contributions in progress.

This document is an introduction to the general concept note and the sub-theme concept notes, which give a fuller account of the challenges to be met by the 2012 ADEA Triennale.