State of Education in Africa Conference Outcomes 2015

CONFERENCE HELD: September 2, 2015 in Lagos, Nigeria

OUTCOMES PUBLISHED: November 2015

*Co-sponsored by the Ford Foundation and The World Bank*

Overview

The Africa-America Institute (AAI) hosted its Second Annual State of Education in Africa conference on September 2 in Lagos, Nigeria. Educators and innovators from Africa and globally gathered to assess the progress of primary, secondary, tertiary, technical and vocational education in Africa.

The conference's overarching goals were:

- **To have a solution-driven conversation** with policy-makers, educators, administrators, philanthropists and those interested in capacity-building about the challenges and opportunities in education on the African continent.

- **To elevate and mainstream the conversation on education** as a key component of the economic development narrative of Africa.

- **To use AAI's convening power, visibility and thought-leadership** to uniquely identify the primary obstacles and practical interventions, which must be implemented to improve the educational land-scape in Africa.

The conference outcomes report provides reflections and insights from some of the world's leading thinkers and practitioners in education on thematic, country and sector approaches to expanding education and strengthening the capacity of Africans and educational institutions.
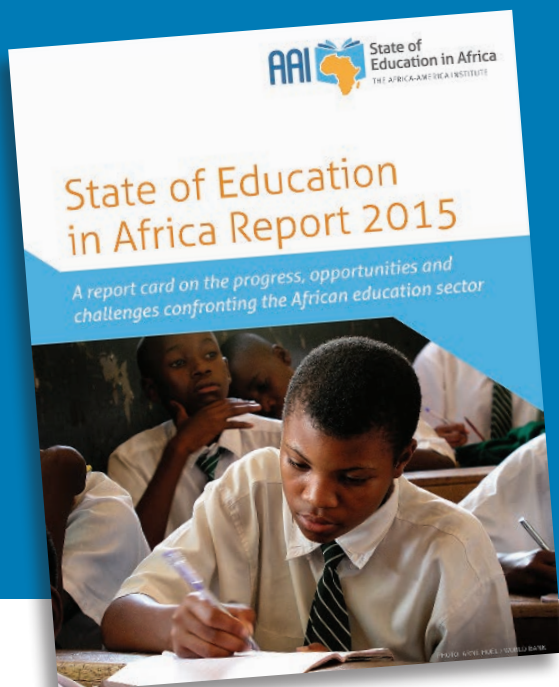
The State of Education in Africa Report

The State of Education in Africa 2015 report, which was released at the conference, provided a snapshot of the progress and challenges in the African education sector. It was produced to guide some of the discussions that took place on panels and the keynote address at the State of Education in Africa conference.

Download the report PDF at http://www.aaionline.org/insights/issue-and-policy-briefs/

Panel 1

Teacher Training: Equipping new educators with the tools they need for success

MODERATOR: **Amini Kajunju**, *President and CEO, The Africa-America Institute (AAI)*

Pius Achanga, *Head, University Affairs, National Council of Higher Education, Uganda*

Julius S. Nelson, Jr., *Vice President for Student Affairs, University of Liberia*

Ola David, *Head of Innovations, Connect Academia; and Education Advisor, Permanent Mission of Nigeria to the United Nations*

Oluyomi Ola-David, *Development Economist & Faculty Member, Department of Economics & Development Studies, Covenant University- Nigeria*

▶ Description:

There is no quality education without qualified teachers, yet the acute shortage of qualified teachers has been identified as one of the biggest challenges to achieving education for all. There are still many populations of students in Africa who do not have access to teachers with the capacity to respond to their educational needs. How do we expand the vision of what is required from a teacher in order to ensure that their mastery of basic topics positions them to best educate our children? This panel will provide a look at how we are currently training teachers and the opportunities and challenges of improving the current conditions. It will also be a forum for examining all local, national, regional policies, practice, experiments and research on the training of teachers including the effect of school administration on teachers in primary and secondary schools.

▶ Lessons/Recommendations/Key Observations

- **Implementation of a Standardized Teacher Certification Process.** Many African countries do not have a teacher certification process in place to measure whether their teachers are effective in the classroom. Panelists suggested that a rigorous national certification for teachers must be implemented, particularly subject-matter teaching to ensure that teachers are well equipped and prepared to teach students. The certification process will also ensure that teachers are competent and can improve educational outcomes.

- **Ongoing Professional Development for Teachers.** Teachers are the key to quality education. Throughout Africa, after teachers finish their teacher training courses their education halts. Panelists agreed that teachers need to move beyond the traditional teaching approaches to encourage a sense of wonder in their students and teach critical thinking. National education systems must provide ongoing professional development for their teachers to transform the education sector and to increase their country's global competitiveness.

- **New Approaches to Retain Good Teachers.** The panel discussed the fact that good teachers often drop out of the education sector due to low teacher salaries and support. Panelists suggested that teacher salaries must be raised to keep good teachers in the school system. Schools of Education across the continent need to receive increased recognition and support to bolster the prestige of teachers. In Nigeria, for example, many students who fail to get into schools of engineering, law or medicine are selected for education schools. High-performing students—characterized by one panelist as "the best brains of the classroom"—should be encouraged to see the value of entering into the field of education.

- **Raise Standards in Education through Evaluation and Measurement.** Standard evaluation and measurement processes must be put in place to monitor the effectiveness and learning outcomes of national education systems. The evaluation process should be an inclusive process, not a top down approach. Student assessments are an effective tool in measuring teacher performance, so students should be engaged in providing feedback on teachers into process.

- **Governments Must Prioritize Teacher Training.** Panelists noted that the government must prioritize the importance of teacher training in building the nation's workforce and increasing growth by devoting increased teacher training support and resources.

Panel 2

Reforming Science and Technology Education in Africa: Energizing and Unlocking Bright Minds for a Bright Future

MODERATOR: **Brian McGinley**, *Development and Strategy Officer, The Africa-America Institute (AAI)*

Dorayi M. Aminu, *Study Group Coordinator, Institute for Security Studies, Abuja and Visiting Professor, Distance Learning Centre, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria*

Marcel Silue, *Associate Dean, Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM), International University of Grand-Bassam, Cote d'Ivoire*

▶ *Description:*

Rapid changes in the world—including technological advancement, scientific innovation, increased globalization, shifting workforce demands, and pressures of economic competitiveness—are redefining the broad skill sets that students need to be adequately prepared to participate in and contribute to today's society. Well trained graduates in science and technology based disciplines can help their countries find effective, cost-efficient, homegrown solutions to pressing development problems that are related to poverty, food security, climate change, urbanization and health. Science and Technology are vitally important for increasing Africa's competitiveness. Africa's training infrastructure has historically been under-valued and under-resourced which, in turn, has negatively impacted the capacity of the continent to supply the needed skills base, especially in science and technology. This panel will discuss critical priorities and potential solutions

to upgrade higher education systems related to science and technology across Africa, making them more competitive and relevant to the needs of its fast-growing economies and competitive in today's world. This panel will examine avenues in which we can increase support for young people in Africa to take advantage of improved education within the science and technology fields as well as ways to ensure that Africa contributes to the global pool of scientific knowledge and technological innovations.

▶ *Lessons/Recommendations/Key Observations*

- **Train More Qualified Teachers to Teach Science, Technology and Engineering, and Math.** Currently, there is a dearth of qualified teachers to teach science, technology, engineering and math in school. Schools of education need to encourage more teachers to be capable of teaching STEM courses.

- **Laboratory Equipment for Science Instruction**. Schools need to upgrade their laboratory equipment to the industry standard required for experiments and other scientific research. The capacity of teachers must also be upgraded to know how to use laboratory equipment and to train students at a high level.

- **Introduce STEM Courses in Primary Schools.** In many African schools, STEM courses are taught on the secondary school level. The panel encouraged education systems to introduce STEM at the primary school level because the motivation to study science often comes at an early age. Schools could offer science summer camps, including creating girl-specific summer camps for gender parity in the field of science.

- **Embrace Distance Learning.** Noting that the continent does not have the capacity to educate all students, one panelist noted that distance learning programs can assist in expanding access to education and in delivering world-class instruction of interest through online programs. Distance learning can also assist with professional development across all sectors.

- **Stronger Connections Between Education Sector and Industry.** There needs to be a stronger connection between the national education sector and industry. If there is not a strong connection between employers and universities, universities will continue to produce graduates with few skillsets for today's workforce. To make an impact, the government needs to overhaul the education sector's STEM curriculum to better align with workforce needs.

  In working closer with the national education system, industry can provide insight into the skillset and requirements needed for specific professions. Industry is constantly looking for talent for managerial positions. Graduates equipped with the right skillset are more likely to find work. Internships or apprenticeship within industries are also required to produce qualified and experienced potential employees.

- **Accelerate Infrastructure Development.** In order to increase Africa's global competitiveness, African governments must accelerate in investing in infrastructure development. The lack of infrastructure in Africa considerably impacts science, technology and engineering, and math. Governments must provide environment for excellent learning to take place. For example, chemistry students conducting lab work need reliable access to water, gas and electricity. Constant power outages will disrupt learning and have a negative effect on lab results. Greater investment in internet connectivity will give students access to information and research to enhance their STEM education.

Panel 3

Spotlight on Vocational and Technical Training and Higher Education: What is the contribution of the African university in today's educational climate?

MODERATOR: **Innocent Chukwuma**, *Representative for West Africa, Ford Foundation*

Olatunde Adekola, *Senior Education Specialist, Africa Region, World Bank*

Olive Branch, *Resource Mobilization Manager for Economic Projects Transformational Facility & Adjunct Faculty, Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Kenya*

Oluwayemisi Fajemidagba, *GE Nigeria Learning & Development leader*

Ahmed Legrouri, *Vice President of Academic Affairs, International University of Grand-Bassam, Cote d'Ivoire*

▶ *Description:*

Public universities, as well as vocational technical training schools in Africa are institutions that need to be nurtured, grown and protected as a major investment in the future and a clear indicator of global success for future generations. African universities can be viewed as a critical piece of the educational infrastructure and a place of excellence and innovation. Vocational and technical schools ensure that the African workforce of tomorrow will be trained to use 21st century technology. Universities conduct research that expands knowledge and offer public educational services that benefit communities near and far. Over the past 25 years, these higher education systems in Africa have attracted nominal support and investment. Some of the main difficulties include low government and leadership support, fiscal challenges, increasing student enrollments and declining quality standards. How will Africa's public universities maintain their relevancy? What is the role of the emerging private university? This panel will explore practical solutions, the need for vocational/technical training and challenges and opportunities in higher education throughout the African continent.

▶ *Lessons/Recommendations/Key Observations*

- **Invest in Technical and Vocational Schools.** Government must increase funding for technical and vocational schools. Technical and vocational schools must ensure that the training and skillset conducted by teachers are at global standards. The technical and vocational school curriculum must produce graduates who will fulfill the needs of employers and society, as a whole.

  A panelist emphasized that technical and vocational schools need to be seen as dignified as universities. Too many students are pursuing a formal education to become doctors and lawyers and do not

want to go into a vocational field. There needs to be shift in thinking so that technical and vocational school training to become an electrician, plumber or welder is not stigmatized or seen as route to a "lower profession".

- **Development of Soft Skills.** Panelists agreed that vocational and technical training should not emphasize only technical skills, but graduates must also communicate well, be entrepreneurial, and possess leadership skills.

- **Address Mismatch between Educational System and Demands of Industry.** The future of Africa lies in a strong education system that prepares its citizens for the job market and development of entrepreneurs. Given the high employment among young people, an effective education system must prepare not just job seekers, but also job creators. There is a mismatch between the education received in school and the demands of industry. Too many graduates are not employable in an industry.

- **Increased Collaboration and Partnerships Between Stakeholders.** A technical education is not inexpensive and will require substantial investment from governments. Partnerships with the private sector can assist in providing resources and equipment for competitive jobs in a global economy.

  A panelist noted that more money does not guarantee a good education, therefore, professional associations, civil society, philanthropies and international development partners can support technical and vocational schools in the development of workers for specific sectors.

- **Government Provide Enabling Environment and Skills.** Many educational systems are failing Africa's youth. The government needs to invest in inclusive education to ensure that all students have access to education irrespective of gender and economic circumstances. The education sector needs to put in place foundational skills to ensure that children receive, at minimum, a basic education. National education systems need to invest in training teachers to be competent enough to teach at global standards. The use of information technology can be leveraged to break down barriers to knowledge and education.

  Governments must also collect data and statistics to know how many youth will enter the workforce and to provide educational opportunities to prepare students with the right skillset for the workforce on a local and national level.

Panel 4

Early Childhood Education: Helping the most at-risk succeed

MODERATOR: **Melissa Howell**, *Program Officer, Transformational Leadership Program (TLP), The Africa-America Institute (AAI)*

Adeyemi Adewole, *Co-Promoter, Sustainability School, Lagos*

Williams Emeka Obiozor, *Director, International Collaboration & Linkages, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Nigeria*

Julie Ude Ibiam, *Professor of Early Childhood Education, University of Nigeria—Nsukka*

▶ *Description:*

Early childhood education is critical to all children and should be available to all. Education early in a child's life helps to develop skills, knowledge, a sense of responsibility and confidence while providing a sound basis for learning. A growing body of international evidence shows that appropriate investment in early childhood development benefits society as a whole. A strong foundation in early childhood lays the groundwork for responsible citizenship, economic prosperity, healthy communities, and successful parenting of the next generation. Many school-aged children in Africa are performing poorly and fail to acquire numeracy and literacy skills. This may be a possible consequence of the lack of early education for these children. Children who participate in quality early education programs at an early age are more ready to learn when they begin

school and are less likely to repeat grades or drop out of school. How can we strive to offer the best opportunities for positive human development when children are at the greatest risk? Because negative influences on a child's early development can be irreversible, this panel will expose recent developments and improvements in the goals of achieving exceptional early childhood education in Africa as well as discuss some of the shortcomings, challenges and struggles to overcome.

▶ *Lessons/Recommendations/Key Observations*

- **Increased Parental Education and Involvement in Education.** Parental education is important to give parents the skills to support their children's education, especially for first-time parents. Parents need to understand that some schools may expect that their children should come to school with some basic education. Thus, parents must be equipped with the skills to support their children's education.

- **Qualified Teachers in Early Education.** Early childhood education is a relatively new education sector in Africa. Today, there are few qualified early education teachers who specialize in child development. National education systems need to invest in developing quality early education teachers, including initiating teacher certification and rigorous interview process. Teachers and caregivers need to prepare students for entering primary school as well as "soft skills" like learning to be respectful and problem solving strategies. Early childhood education teachers must also be able to screen children early for any learning disabilities and special needs.

- **Creation of Child-Centric Early Education Schools.** The education sector is encouraged to follow an internationally-recognized curriculum of early childhood education. Additionally, schools that are child-centric will deliver quality programs. Becoming a child-centric school will involve investing in a solid curriculum and quality child-friendly environment. A panelist noted that some early education centers do not have playgrounds and give children an opportunity to engage in appropriate play-centered learning.

- **Government Must Make Early Education a Priority.** All stakeholders need to be involved in financing early childhood education: government, civil society, parent-teacher association and private sector. Governments can develop an enabling environment that includes policies that will help all students, including offering services for students who are vulnerable with disabilities.

Panel 5

Global Best Practices in Education

MODERATOR: **Amini Kajunju**, *President and CEO, The Africa-America Institute (AAI)*

Lawalley Cole, *Coordinator, Working Group on Communication for Education and Development, Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA), African Development Bank*

Devang Vussonji, *Associate Partner and Global Leader, Employment & Education Practice, Dalberg*

Limbani Nsapato, *Regional Coordinator, The Africa Network Campaign on Education for All (ANCEFA), Zambia*

Ndidi Nwuneli, *Founder, LEAP Africa*

▶ *Description:*

Countries approaching full primary-school coverage increasingly realize that the pursuit of education for all should not do so at the expense of excellence. Governments from China to Brazil are now talking about quality, a concept which covers everything from the physical condition of schools to better training for teachers and staff. The availability of textbooks and modern facilities including computers and tablets is critical in today's world. Students who receive a balanced curriculum will have the knowledge, skills and abilities to connect ideas and concepts across all disciplines and are well-prepared for this globalized knowledge-based world. This panel will present global best practices that highlight how to create successful learning environments for students.

▶ *Lessons/Recommendations/Key Observations*

- **Education Systems Moving Towards Experiential Learning.** Instead of being subject-based, where education is based on knowledge and skills, some educational systems are moving towards an education that does not tell you what to think, but how to make the most of an experience. From that experience, students will learn how to solve problems or work collaboratively as a team.

- **Teacher-Centered Approach.** A teacher-centered approach equips teachers with the skills to teach their students how to make an impact with the knowledge gained in class, so it is "part and parcel" of the learning process. Teachers are also monitored to evaluate the quality of their teaching and assess learning outcomes.

- **Local Ownership of Education.** There is a growing recognition that schools are increasingly "owned" by their local communities. While a panelist mentioned that this perspective is not widely accepted at all levels in Africa, this approach holds schools, parents, and communities responsible for ensuring a quality education for all children. Faith-based groups from churches and mosques are considered as potential venues and options for overcrowded schools. Community volunteers can be tapped to provide tutorial services and support to students in need of academic support.

- **Curriculum Development:** National education curriculums need to be updated to transform the education sector. New curriculum content that includes critical thinking and other new evidence-based approaches should be developed for all levels of education.

- **Competition within Education Sector.** When India was experiencing low levels of education outcomes and government budgets shrank a couple of decades ago, private education swelled. The proliferation of private schools led to intense competition among private and public schools. The proliferation of educational choices eventually led to an improvement in the quality of education as competition pushed the government to invest in producing quality public schools to retain high-performing students.

  Since education is a public good, panelists debated whether competition is necessary and will produce better learning outcomes. One panelist suggested that civil society groups and private sector should publish a ranking of top schools and provide data on schools that produce more skilled and employable workers. Another panelist stated that since education is a right, competition should not be necessary because it is the responsibility of the government to guarantee a right to education.

- **Creative Financing for Education Sector.** With limited resources to fund education systems, governments need to find creative ways to finance education. Impact investing, partnerships across sectors, and building ecosystems with the private sector were cited as approaches to attract new financing for the education sector.

  It was also noted that when resources are stretched, it is often when innovation takes place because education officials and other stakeholders are forced to come up with creative solutions with a tight budget.

Keynote Address

Dr. Patrick Utomi, Founder/CEO, Centre for Values in Leadership

▶ *Lessons/Recommendations/Key Observations*

- **Shifting Mindset from Colonial Education System.** Education during the colonial era was tailored to provide only the bare minimums of information. Students received knowledge from another part of the world and were taught only what they needed to know to function within a colonial system. The diaspora played a pivotal a role in societal changes in China, India, and Japan as they returned to their home country and helped to create social transformation.

- **Stagnation in Africa's Growth.** As Europe achieved major advancements in the 20th century, Africa fell further behind. This fact is attributed to what Dr. Utomi called the "pedagogy of the oppressed". Brazilian philosopher Paulo Freire noted that this occurs when limited information is imparted to keep a population oppressed and where you want them. Utomi recalled a radical Marxist perspective that called for oppressed people to reject education from a certain region of the world.

- **"Pedagogy of the Determined" Vision.** Utomi envisions a world that is shaped by a "pedagogy of the determined", where an individual helps to create a world based on creating values and building institutions and web of relations that support continual improvement of the world and community. This new vision seeks to shift the mindset of young people to envision a different world than they are in now, move social order to that vision.

- **Focus on Primary Education.** Noting that some people have an "obsession with tertiary education", Utomi said people need to understand that education starts much earlier. He believes that primary education is the most important level of education, but people do not pay enough attention to improving this level. Utomi said it is important for young people to see the world that they would like to create early. He encouraged parents to realize that they are the first teachers of their children and that teachers only assist in the child's education. "Until parents realize this, the education system will be suboptimal process and best executed at primary level," he emphasized.

- **Accelerating Progress in Africa:** During the 20th century, the human development of Africans and Europeans were very close, and then productivity shot up in Europe due to educational advancements. Given today's global entrepreneurial and technologically driven society, Africa has a great opportunity to leapfrog and bridge socioeconomic gap. Education will be instrumental in achieving advancements.

Fireside Chat

Iyinoluwa Aboyeji, Co-founder of Andela

▶ *Lessons/Recommendations/Key Observations*

- **Andela's Mission.** Andela is a movement that seeks to build the next generation of African world class technology leaders. Selected participants are trained to become software developers and then attain internships in the U.S. and Nigeria.

- **Advancements in Technology.** The continent of Africa is the world's fastest growing region in internet connectivity. Aboyeji sees technology as the future of work and learning and can make an impact around the world.

- **Technology to Solve Problems.** Aboyeji said there is a need for young people to solve problems through technology. However, in order to find the solution through technology, African countries need skilled talent.

- **Building a Pipeline of Technology Leaders.** There has been a seismic shift in workforce where jobs can be done from anywhere in the world. This gives African software developers an opportunity to compete for jobs on a world scale.

- **Unlocking Talent in Africa.** To unlock talent on the African continent will take different approaches to improving education:

  1. **Realization about state of education.** Over a billion young people are joining workforce with less than a third of spaces to accommodate them in universities. Most will have nowhere to go to receive a tertiary education. Governments need to recognize the urgency of this issue and devote their budget to serve the education section.

  2. **New leadership is needed to fix education challenges.** Citing that the Minister of Education is the only government cabinet position that he would accept, Aboyeji said to achieve scale and expand education, new leadership is needed to realize and implement innovative solutions that include mobile technology as part of the solution. There is an opportunity to translate the potential of mobile technology into growth for the continent. Andela has produced a home study on the basics of computer science that he hopes will produce talent much faster using technology.

PitchFest Competition

Samson Abioye, executive director of Pass_NG, a mobile app that helps students prepare for Nigeria's admission examinations, was the first place winner of AAI's first-ever PitchFest competition. The PitchFest competition highlighted cutting-edge ideas, tools, information and technologies that can help bring about a better educational system in Africa. With nearly 80 submissions, four finalists had three minutes to pitch their concept to conference attendees. Conference attendees voted on the most innovative idea. Each finalist received a cash prize for first, second, third and fourth place after votes were tabulated.

▶ *Other finalists include:*

- **Title: "A Mobile Library and Outdoor Readers Hub for Children" by Edem Dorothy Ossai.** The Mobile Library and Outdoor Readers Hub seeks to address the lack of school or local libraries for children (both in-school and out-of-school) living in Nigeria's poor communities and districts.

- **Title: "AfroTalez" by Elizabeth Kperrun-Eremie.** "AfroTalez" is a storytelling app for kids aged 2-10, which narrates African folktales while also incorporating basic skills such as counting, object recognition and more through puzzles and other fun tasks.

- **Title: "Growing Up Well" by Nneamaka Ugbomah.** "Growing Up Well" is multimedia programming of radio, TV and internet programs that have both entertainment and educational value, with a strong emphasis on education.

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