



Promoting critical skills for the accelerated and sustainable development of Africa

The key messages of the ADEA Triennale



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A Triennale at the heart of Africa's economic and social future

What marked the ADEA's 2012 Triennale above all was that it placed the debate on education and training within the context of Africa's current social and economic conditions. The point was not to rest content with an abstract vision of the reforms needed in this field, but to respond to the questions and concerns that face Africans today, regardless of their country of origin. These questions concern not only the difficulties posed by people's daily lives, but also their hopes and visions of what could and should be their lives tomorrow and after tomorrow. All this was captured in a underlying theme that ran through the Triennale discussion: "**How can we progress from a subsistence-based, survival economy to one based on growth, added value and sustainable development?**" These issues were concretized through the demand expressed at the Triennale's outset, as a challenge to be met by the collaborative efforts of all the participants: "**What kind of education and training will ensure that everyone has a job, a salary and positive life prospects?**"

The Triennale was thus an event that situated the promotion of "critical knowledge, skills and qualifications" at the centre of Africa's development over the short, medium and long term. The objective was not to promote institutional reform number N+1 of the education and training systems, but instead to greatly enhance their effectiveness and relevance. **In short, the point was to make education and training drivers of sustainable development in Africa.**

A Triennale commensurate with the social and global challenges

The 2012 Triennale was a milestone in the long series of Biennales that had preceded it. **Indeed, for the first time in the history of the ADEA, it brought together all the public and private actors involved in the field of education and training:** institutional heads and policy makers, employer federations in the formal sector, professional organizations from the informal crafts sector and agriculture, the social partners, civil society representatives, young people from all educational levels, students, workers, the unemployed ... in a word, the Triennale provided a place and a time to mobilize all Africa's strengths, as only such a mobilization on behalf of education and training will make it possible to effectively promote the sustainable development of Africa.

The 2012 Triennale was also marked from the outset by situating sustainable development within the context of globalization. Indeed, the events kicked off with **Africa-Korea Day**, which provided an opportunity for participants to learn about the political, institutional, economic and social dynamics that allowed South Korea to become the 10th leading world power over the last 60 years: in 1950 it was marked by the same level of poverty as most African countries. This Day showed that Africa could, if it makes major, well-chosen investments in education and training, accelerate its own development – it could "run while others walk", and thereby play its full role in the context of globalization over the medium and long term.

Diaspora Day, which preceded the day marking the Africa-Korea partnership, strengthened Africa's globalized positioning and highlighted the wealth of skills, motivation and commitment available among the members of the African Diaspora. Loyalty to their origins has led African expatriates to become more and more strongly involved in the continent's economic and social life. This involvement passes through multiple channels: the creation of personal and professional projects; the transfer of funds for local development activities; equity investments in entrepreneurial projects; and, ultimately, for some, the decision to return definitively to their homeland. Regardless of the channel they choose, the members of the Diaspora represent a unique potential for the continent to synchronize itself with the realities and norms of globalization.

A Triennale at the service of Africa's ownership of its own development

There was a widespread consensus binding the hundreds of participants from 54 African countries: **their common desire to link their current situation with a positive vision of Africa's future** and to draw on every means at their disposal, especially in the fields of education and training, to accelerate current growth and to make these tools for the ownership of their past and their future.

One major lesson of the Triennale could be summarized as follows: even if Africa has been enriched by the partnerships it has forged in the course of north-south cooperation, it must increasingly engage in south-south cooperation. This will provide it the best means of taking control of its own future and writing a new chapter in its history, on a scale worthy of its immense natural wealth, but also and above all its unique social, cultural and human resources. **Africans must have control over the means and resources needed for the continent's sustainable development.** They can ensure such mastery provided that they build on the dynamics noted during the Triennale discussions:

- **The development of nationwide cooperation** between all the public, private and civil society actors involved in basic education, technical and professional skills development and the production of scientific and technological knowledge. This development should lead to a national strategic vision that is shared by everyone involved and a **partnership agreement** that commits them to cooperative action in the fields of education and training.
- **The development of inter-country cooperation** to maximize the sharing of the most innovative experiences in the design and construction of relevant and effective educational and training programmes and systems. Such cooperation already exists among some sub-regions (SADC, ECOWAS, etc.). It is at the heart of the inter-country quality nodes supported by the ADEA in the fields of literacy and national languages, education for peace and technical and vocational skills development (TVSD). **There will be no sustainable development for the continent without inter-country cooperation** and, more precisely, without an **inter-African pooling** of the resources and methods needed to promote effective and relevant education and training programmes.

A Triennale that calls for a right of access for all, throughout life, to common core skills

Analysis of the current situation clearly shows that Africa has stagnated in terms of human development from 1990 to 2010 and, because of this, has fallen behind the rest of the world. **It is therefore urgent that the continent invests in improving and expanding educational attainment and literacy.** This is crucial in order to escape the stagnation in which the continent has been mired and to initiate a virtuous circle of sustainable development, which requires, as witnessed through Korea's experience, universal basic education, or what the Triennale called "common core skills". The various contributions made during the preparatory period and in the discussions among the participants gathered in Ouagadougou highlighted the strategic importance for young people and adults alike to have access to these common core skills (CCS).

1. The CCS go beyond the current concept of basic education and include a set of lifelong cognitive, communication and learning skills, as well as integration into society and the world of work, personal development and the construction of an African identity ... all of which gives those who acquire the CCS an ability to control their own human, social and economic development and act as responsible and active African citizens.
2. The CCS are not reserved to those who attend formal school, but must be accessible to everyone, including the most vulnerable and most disadvantaged, by means of non-formal and informal education and training programs situated as close as possible to places of work and daily life. Furthermore, the greatest challenge that Africa faces is rapidly achieving the population's full literacy. Otherwise the large mass of the continent's human capital, who are illiterate and semi-literate, cannot be unleashed to build a 21st century Africa. The experience of South Korea was more than edifying in this regard. The Koreans attribute the rapid rise of their homeland into the ranks of the developed countries to a vast and sustained campaign for literacy and community mobilization, based on a shared vision of development, which was launched just after the civil war that divided the country into two.
3. Universal access to CCS requires a revolution in teaching and learning in the sense that teachers need to develop their approach to the curriculum in cooperation with, and with the involvement of, the stakeholders, in order to provide access to the knowledge and skills that ensure inclusion and integration into everyday life, including as citizens and in the workplace.
4. Universal access to CCS requires that both teachers and the managers of the education and training programs continually update their professional skills in order to train young people and adults in the ever-changing world of business, and professional, social and public life. They become, not just teachers and managers, but mediators of learning that is active and inclusive.
5. Finally, the implementation of CCS requires a radical change in the concept of school. This involves going to a school without walls, that is to say, an educational setting that is open to every means of acquiring knowledge and skills and people's social development and as good citizens.

It is important, ultimately, to create conditions for lifelong learning that go beyond the current limitations of age and schooling and provide access to knowledge and skills that encompass all aspects of personal and collective life and ultimately ensure people's social, economic and professional integration.

A Triennale that puts jobs and growth at the heart of policies on technical and vocational skills development (TVSD)

The interventions by representatives of the private sector during the Triennale clearly showed that Africa urgently needs to make massive investments in vocational training if it wants to generate internal growth that is capable of both addressing the unemployment and underemployment of youth and adults and creating businesses, jobs and substantial economic revenue. Without such investment, these representatives said, it is impossible to promote sustainable development, let alone value-added growth. This observation, shared by all, led the Triennale to emphasize how important it is for current education and training policy to stop downgrading or according a minor role to TVSD. It must be integrated into existing programmes, with the same value and resources as general education programmes. The discussion then focused on the priorities for action so as to ensure that TVSD has an effective impact on jobs and growth.

1. TVSD must do more than just train and qualify. It must also ensure insertion into the labour market which presupposes that from the outset vocational training schemes take into account the ways and means to facilitate integration.
2. As the African economy is largely informal, it is important to raise the level of technological qualifications and expertise with respect both to assets in the agricultural and rural sector and to those of producers of goods and services in the urban sector. This is one way of fighting poverty and promoting the transition from a subsistence economy to a more profitable growth-oriented economy.
3. In most countries there exists unmet demand for higher skills and qualifications in occupations and sectors with high added value. It is therefore necessary to design and set up programs to train senior and other technicians with the skills required by the development of innovative activities that generate employment, especially in small and medium enterprises.
4. All TVSD programmes must be designed, implemented and supervised based on a partnership with all the stakeholders in the field of training. The point is to give particular attention to training that is conducted in partnership with the business and professional world, since it is very likely to be effective and relevant and to match the existing demand for skills.
5. It is important for each country to establish a national qualification framework for recognizing and validating the various modes of skills acquisition, based on their equal worth. This is the only way to integrate the various formal, non-formal and informal TVSD programmes into a coherent and unified system and at the same time to promote lifelong learning and training.

The discussion held during the Triennale concluded that the Inter-Country Quality Node (ICQN) on TVSD was an important means to flesh out these recommendations, especially as new countries have expressed a strong interest in becoming involved.

A Triennale that places science, technology and research at the heart of promoting innovation and growth in Africa

The evidence on the situation of higher education and research is unambiguous: Africa has not invested adequate resources to play its rightful role in the global production of scientific, technological and industrial knowledge. The initiatives taken by some "repatriates" from the Diaspora as well as by some manufacturing and services companies nevertheless indicate that the potential exists to enable the continent to take its place in a globalized economy based on knowledge and skills. Realizing this potential demands the establishment of robust policies and measures in the field of higher education.

1. **It is necessary to reposition the role and position of science and technology** in all education and training systems, from basic education to the university level. These two disciplines are for the moment completely undervalued, whereas World Bank studies show that at least a third of graduates must be trained in science and engineering for technological assimilation to take place in a given country. A special effort should be made to train teachers for excellence in this area and to attract more girls into the study of math and science.
2. **There is an urgent need to strengthen university / business partnerships at the national, sub-regional and continental levels.** These partnerships are vital to ending the mass unemployment of young graduates that is due essentially to the disconnect between the skills produced by higher education and those required by technological and occupational change. The partnerships are essential to structure university research to meet the needs of the business world to significantly improve the quality and competitiveness of its products and services and thereby initiate a virtuous circle of sustainable development. And finally, they are the only way to create the shared clusters of innovation that the continent needs to create growth, added value and employment, drawing on the vast natural resources available to it.
3. An analysis of the current situation of research and researchers in Africa clearly shows **the tiny role played by the continent in the production of knowledge and innovation at the global level.** But there is a huge potential just waiting to be exploited: a rich indigenous knowledge that arises out of the diversity of cultures and skills and is produced non-formally and informally; a Diaspora trained in excellence around the world; youth thirsting for a spirit of initiative, creativity and entrepreneurship; public and private officials in quest of economic and technological leadership; and more. The country and the entire region must put an end to the stagnation of resources devoted to research and **invest at least 1% of GDP in the creation of theoretical and practical concepts that can generate and accelerate sustainable development.**

Conclusion

The Triennale cannot rest content with statements of principle. It must, in accordance with the sharp statements made at the end of the meeting, lead to a paradigm shift: one that can effectively move society as it is to the society that we want and have decided upon. **The transition from vision to reality is the Gordian knot that Africa must cut in order to promote the continent's accelerated and sustainable development.**

The Heads of State present at the start of the Triennale, the many ministers of education and training that took part in the discussion, the representatives of the private sector and civil society, the youth who contributed actively to the various plenary and parallel sessions, the international partners who provided expertise based on their specific experience: all of these officials, stakeholders, and participants pledged to ensure the operational follow-up of the Triennale.

This follow-up is the great post-Ouagadougou challenge that the ADEA has taken up, together with all the actors involved. **The real outcome of the Triennale will be the reforms and the actual changes that are made in the short, medium and long term in the forthcoming history of an Africa that has firmly established an economy based on knowledge and skills.**