

Address to the Biennial Meeting of the Association for The Development of Education in Africa (Adea)

Johannesburg, 6 December 1999

Education Ministers from African Countries
Representatives of Donor Organisations
Distinguished Delegates
Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am honoured to be here today and to welcome to South Africa all who have travelled from other countries on our continent and other parts of the world.

I accepted the invitation to speak here today fully aware that the development of Africa depends today on educators like yourselves.

It is of enormous importance that we do not falter to provide an education appropriate to the long-term needs of our context and in order to equip us fully to meet the many challenges of the 21st Century.

If the next century is going to be characterised as a truly African century, for the social and economic progress of the African people, the century of durable peace and sustained development in Africa, then the success of this project is dependent on the success of our education systems. For nowhere in the world has sustained development been attained without a well-functioning system of education, without universal and sound primary education, without an effective higher education and research sector, without equality of educational opportunity.

The enormity of the task at hand is magnified when we consider the legacy of colonial education, the long-term effects of the domination of the African peoples both through brute force and thought control, through divorcing the African child from his or her own experiences and environment, through systematic processes of alienation and also assimilation, in this way bringing about what Ngugi aptly described as "the domination of the mental universe of the colonised."

Furthermore, the incorporation of the African people through colonial education into the capitalist world was deliberately incomplete, designed to create economic dependents, an exploited class of labourers, rather than entrepreneurs and economic producers.

Thus, the natural capacity of Africans to produce was suppressed, Africa was impoverished by the destruction of traditional agriculture, thus reducing her own capacity to feed herself and Africans were forced into becoming nations of primary producers rather than working together as builders of enterprises and industries.

Moreover, Africa's own rich legacy of education in ancient times, its position as a leading centre of learning, was forgotten as people were pushed back into poverty, their histories as if wiped out.

Nevertheless, the resilient struggle of our movements for African liberation produced a common vision of African unity and development, of an end to the marginalisation of our continent in world progress and development.

The neo-colonial experience, which simply continued the systematic exploitation of the African people albeit in an altered form, and through a new elite that still acted in the interests of its imperialist masters, together with the failure of sustained development being possible in one country alone, further supported the view that only through continental co-operation and solidarity could Africa achieve peace, prosperity and a better life for all its people, nations and countries.

It is in this historical context that intra-African education institutions and agencies, and the Association for the Development of Education in Africa in particular, find themselves today and in which they must collectively effect change. In this way, through the strengthening of relations between different countries in the area of education, we are cementing African unity and becoming actively engaged as educationalists in a continental offensive for African social, economic and cultural development.

Our present phase of development requires the growth and consolidation of a class of intellectuals whose fundamental task must be in the economic and social areas. For, if we are to build entrepreneurs in Africa, then at the same time we must also build the intelligentsia.

An integrated approach to development tells us that those who have technical skills and expertise must be complemented with those who are experts in economics, in arts and culture, in the sciences, and those who are directly involved in economic production.

Beyond this, there must be an understanding of the needs to expand our economies through entrepreneurship, through creating conditions favourable for job creation. Thus, the co-operation of the nation states, of government education departments are also required, for the overall basis on which we must move forward together as governments, as entrepreneurs, as academics, must be through partnerships based on our shared vision and goals for a better life for all and not as competitors for wealth, monopoly or power.

If we are in agreement that this is the road ahead, we shall only realise these goals if we have common concerns. Our common concerns in an African agenda for education should include:

- The sharing of ideas and expertise so as to advance, in practical ways, the objective of African development. This also requires a critical and analytical discussion of what constitutes the kind of intellectual activity that brings about innovation. In this way, we must activate our intelligentsia in contributing in concrete, practical ways towards change.
- We must proceed with ongoing, intra-African studies and research into our rich creative and cultural past and rekindle interests into African knowledge systems so as make younger generations aware of the achievements emanating from our continent and to impress upon them their inherent creativity, thus setting the stage for new developments and discoveries.
- We must encourage the use of information technology in education so as to link far-flung places and institutions of learning, to bridge the gap between urban and rural areas and to enable African children to advance scientifically so as to compete on an equal footing with the rest of the world.
- The necessary modernisation of our economies depends on our improving our standards of science education and building our skills base in science and technology.
- We must ensure that measures are put in place to ensure that women, especially those in rural areas, have access to education, especially in areas from which they may have been traditionally excluded.
- At all times, we must seek to build a better life for all, so that the poorest of poor have access to education and the benefits thereof.

For our intellectuals must not become intellectual elites who build academic cocoons in which they reside in relative comfort and complacency safe from the problems of the outside world, but they must actively build a humane society based on values of caring and co-operation.

The HIV/AIDS epidemic is one area of concern that requires the urgent attention of our intelligentsia. Thus, I am pleased that both the Education for All and the ADEA meetings will be tackling this issue head-on, for only in this way can solutions be identified.

I am pleased that this association, through its programmes, especially its "Intra-African Exchanges" has the sharing of African expertise as one of its central concerns. In this way, through the distribution of

research papers, through collective work, through exchanges of academics from different countries and the twinning of institutions, we shall cease to see ourselves simply as fulfilling national roles, but be actively part of continental development.

I believe that we can take this process even further, by recognising the strengths of various institutions or countries in specific areas such as agriculture or medicine, and building these so that students from one country can study in another where this expertise is to be found.

In this way, the basis on which we operate together becomes that of true co-operation rather than competition between various countries and institutions to attract students. There is no reason why students themselves should not be exposed to studying in other countries, in this way developing a continental consciousness of development.

By focusing on successful African experiences in handling issues of access, quality and capacity building in our education systems, the work of the ADEA represents a necessary contribution to African development.

The African child must no longer be subjected to the mental domination that Ngugi has spoken about. We are liberating ourselves and now reside in mental universes of our own making, for our own progress and prosperity.

Since our common concern is to complete the process of liberation by building a caring, humane African society, by bringing about sustained economic development, your contribution in ensuring our self-development is crucial if we are to succeed in our endeavour.

It is with pleasure therefore that I open this ADEA biennial meeting as well as the EFA-2000 (Ministers of Education in Africa) sub-Saharan conference that is being held at the same time.

Over the next few days, as ministers, agencies, professionals and researchers gathered here, you will put your heads together and come with ways in which to deepen our effectiveness and strengthen our partnerships.

I wish you well in your deliberations.

I thank you.