



# Access to education for all in Africa

Engaging, learning, succeeding together

## COOPERATIVE APPROACHES #7

“The only way that offers any hope of a better future for all humanity is through cooperation and partnership”. Kofi Annan

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## EDITORIAL

# The mother of all reforms

Roland DAVAL



The May - June 2020 Cooperative Approaches No. 4 editorial, addressed universal access to health care and human rights. It stressed how at the heart of the current COVID 19 crisis, "*... is importance that all peoples understand pursuing how a path of international cooperation is the only means by which we will be able to address global challenges and discover solutions for the future*". It went on

to suggest that *the **mother of all reforms** is in the area of education since it is so closely linked to virtuous economic development and a widespread societal capacity for critical thinking. An educated population makes it possible to better manage birth rates, better address health problems, avoid the traps of obscurantism (deliberately preventing facts from becoming known), and ultimately aspire*

*towards and perhaps attain a world at peace.*<sup>1</sup>

And yet, it must be noted that while the global number of children out-of-school in Africa has been reduced in recent decades from 105 to 100 million and then to 57 million, "and progress has been made in expanding basic education, there are still more than 31 million children of elementary school age and 23 million lower secondary school children out of school in sub-Saharan Africa, including a disproportionately high percentage in West Africa".<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, the recent lessons to be learned from population containment due to the pandemic shows that when school is no longer there to accommodate children, it is the most disadvantaged families which experience the most severe social difficulties. This is compounded by lack of parental capacity to grasp the school curriculum and support their children from home. In the face of this situation, it is also necessary to talk about isolation and its consequences on development of people and achieving psychological balance since school is also such an



important place for socialization of children and young people.

**Poverty is one of the main factors** contributing to the problem of school exclusion. Poverty and education are thus engaged in a vicious circle that traps entire populations in their misery.

In this issue of Cooperative Approaches, we share with you our thoughts on the **challenges of the access to Education For All (EFA)** initiative especially since mobilization of is still very much in the news. Since everyone has a right to act in his or her rightful self-interest and place, it is no longer

<sup>1</sup> Extract from the associative project of the Education For All Network in Africa (REPTA)

<sup>2</sup> Annual Report 2018 - Regional Multisectoral Office for West-Sahel Africa - UNESCO



feasible nor ethical to close eyes to realities of the world in which we all live.

**As early as 1848, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights affirmed the right to education for all people.** Nearly three quarters of a century later, and despite the successive commitments made by Nation States (see below the article devoted to the main "International orientations for education"), **it is not the reality in 2020.**

To elaborate on this reflection, we have chosen to draw on a French-speaking experience, that of the **Education for All Network in Africa (REPTA)** created in France in 2003 and which, 'aims to bring together legal entities, companies, local authorities, associations and institutions, and individuals to encourage and promote exchanges, shared understanding, partnerships and synergies of actions aimed at the development of education for all in Africa'. REPTA networks exist today in several French-speaking African countries including Burkina Faso, Benin, Mali, Niger, Senegal, and Madagascar. In this edition REPTA members, individuals and legal entities will share their analysis of the situation and their experiences.

To coordinate this issue, we called on Roland DAVAL, one of the

founding members of REPTA. A teacher by training, Roland has spent his entire professional career in associative life: for about thirty years in a secular scouting association, the 'Eclaireuses et Eclaireurs de France' as regional leader, general secretary then general delegate. He then spent a dozen years in management positions at the French 'Volunteers for Progress' (now France Volontaires), which offered young people the opportunity to engage in international solidarity missions and thereby experience rich humane engagement as a first professional experience.



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**TESTIMONIAL**

# A word from the founder of REPTA : Gabriel Cohn-Bendit

As a student and even more so once becoming a teacher, I have been a critic of the French educational system. Though Republicans may have liberated schools from the hold of the Catholic Church and its doctrine, they simply turned it over to another prescriptive ideology, that of nationalism. The French school system is now designed to produce 'good little French children' who are too often taught a false historic narrative about their glorious descent from Gallic peoples. They teach too much French literature of the 17th century (Corneille, Racine, ...), which forever discourages young people from developing an interest in reading.

When, in 1981, François MITTERAND was elected President of France, I was able to meet the Minister of National Education, Alain SAVARY, who permitted me to create the "experimental high school" of Saint-Nazaire. This new school welcomed young people who had been excluded or whom the schools had excluded. After five



years of exciting work in this establishment I announced to the faculty that I felt the weight of the founders had become too great having a inhibiting impact on the group so I would step away for the 1987=1988 school year

Since assuming a position within a traditional high school was out of the question for me, I was open to possibilities. It was then that I met the Minister of Foreign Affairs from Burkina Faso, Basile GUISSOU. We became friends and he invited me to his country.

During a meal there with expatriates one of the children present mentioned the French high school was looking for a German teacher. I took the position and spent the 1987-1988 school year teaching at the French high school in Ouagadougou.

As my wife did not wish to join me, I returned to France at the end of that year and met with the French Minister of Education. He granted me teacher status and requested that I create the Group of Retired Educators without Borders (Groupe des Retraités Educateurs sans Frontières - GREF). The idea was to connect retired French teachers who had been involved in varied pedagogical initiatives with African teachers and educators. It was on this basis that the association was created and that strategies were developed to engage street children as well as educators.

When Education For All Network in Africa (REPTA) was created in 2003, its foundational concept emerged from an observation that many organizations in the field of education often worked within the framework of partnership but not within wider networks. Hence we had the notion of inviting local French authorities and businesses to collaborate with schools in the service of better quality and access to education for all children.

Most of the affiliated schools at the time, African and French, followed the model of colonial era education where one learned to read and write in French, a language that the majority of children did not speak at all or spoke very poorly. However, there were experiments in bilingual teaching, a method by which one learned to read and write in one's native tongue while also learning to speak French before writing. It turned out that student results were much better in French language acquisition with this method as evidenced by the school certificate exams administered in French. Based on this evidence REPTA decided to place bilingual education at the center of its essential mission informing all its subsequent projects.



## DECIPHERING

# International benchmarks for education

Roland Daval



Photo PNUD Uruguay / Pablo La Rosa. In Montevideo, Uruguay, a little girl studies at home with a laptop provided by the OLPC Foundation (one laptop per child).

How does the international community view the issue of education? What benchmarks have gradually developed to guide governmental and inter-governmental policies? To explore

these questions it is helpful to recall points in history when many politicians around the globe affirmed human rights and rejected nationalism as a fundamental and superseding value.



## 1948: The right to education

At the end of the Second World War, the UN adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on December 10, 1948. The 58 member states at the time comprised the General Assembly of the United Nations Organization and declared the right to education for every person. It is good, even today, to recall this moment and these principles.

Article 26 of this Universal Declaration:

(1) Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least for early childhood and at the elementary school level. Elementary education shall also be

compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.

(2) Education shall be directed to address the development of the whole child (social and emotional development) and to the strengthen respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

(3) Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.

Thus, for the first time in the world, the right to education was recognized for everyone. This right revolves around four fundamental provisions:

1. Education must be open to all up to technical and vocational training and higher education
2. Education must be obligatory and free of charge at least at the elementary school level
3. Education must be directed not only to content instruction but to social emotional development, strengthening of human rights, and advancing understanding among all social and religious groups as well as among nations

4. Parents having the right to choose the type of education their children receive

## 1990: Education for All

Three quarters of a century later, it must be recognized that the right to education for all has not yet been achieved.

On March 5-9, 1990, four international organizations convened the "family" of the United Nations - UNICEF<sup>3</sup>, UNDP<sup>4</sup>, UNESCO<sup>5</sup> and the World Bank<sup>6</sup>. Jointly conceived and organized in Jomtien, Thailand, the World Conference for Education for All (EFA) was launched.

The Jomtien conference set six goals:

1. Expansion of early childhood care and development activities

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<sup>3</sup> UNICEF, the United Nations International Children's Fund was founded in 1946, after the Second World War, to help all children in distress around the world. The guiding thread of UNICEF's work is the International Convention on the Rights of the Child. <https://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention>

<sup>4</sup> The UNDP or United Nations Development Programme is an organization integrating the UN programming efforts founded in 1950. The focus of its creation is on assistance to developing countries.

<sup>5</sup> UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization is based in Paris and seeks to achieve peace through international cooperation in education, science and culture. UNESCO's programmes contribute to achieving the sustainable development goals set out in Agenda 2030 adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2015.

<sup>6</sup> The World Bank is an international financial institution that provides leveraged loans to developing countries for investment projects. The World Bank was created primarily to help Europe and Japan rebuild after The Second World War, but with the decolonization movement of the 1960s, it set itself the additional goal of encouraging economic growth in developing countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America.



2. Universal primary education by the year 2000
3. Improvement of educational outcomes
4. 50% reduction by the year 2000 of the illiteracy rate compared to the 1990 level with sufficient emphasis on female literacy
5. Expansion of basic education and training in other essential skills for youth and adults
6. Improved access for individuals and families to the knowledge, skills and values needed to improve the quality of life and to achieve sound and sustainable development.

Following this conference, which brought together representatives from 115 states and 150 NGOs, the Education For All movement committed to become the driving force behind development of highly inclusive education in developing countries.

## 2000: A new stage for EFA

April 26-28, 2000 in Dakar (Senegal), UNESCO organized the World Education Forum with the same partners - UNDP, UNICEF, World Bank, joined by UNFPA.

Representatives of 164 governments once again advocated for Education For All. They felt achieving the six goals of the first stage was too focused on access to primary education so broadened the scope of EFA in its second stage with six new goals. These were linked to the concept of basic educational benchmarks to be achieved by 2015 and included:

- Expand and improve early childhood education and care, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children
- Ensure that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, living in difficult conditions and those from ethnic minorities, have access to complete, free and compulsory primary education of good quality
- Ensure that the learning needs of all young people and adults can be met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programmes
- Increase by 50% the proportion of literate adults, especially women, and ensure that adults have

equitable access to basic and continuing education by 2015

- Eliminate gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005 and achieve the goal of gender equality with a focus on ensuring women's full and equal access to basic good quality education
- Improve quality in all aspects of education such that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills

Life skills for the first time are to be generally practiced in the extracurricular educational programs and recognized as an essential component of the education process.

## 2015: Education for all throughout life (life-long learning)

UNESCO, together with UNICEF, the World Bank, UNFPA<sup>7</sup>, UNDP, UN

Women<sup>8</sup> and UNHCR<sup>9</sup>, organized the World Education Forum 2015 in Incheon, Republic of Korea, May 19-22, 2015. The Forum adopted the Incheon Declaration for Education 2030 which represents the commitment of the education community to Education 2030 and the Agenda for Sustainable Development to 2030.

This declaration recognizes the essential role of education in the broader development context and become the seed of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations 2030 Programme. SDG #4 on education interacts synergistically with 16 other SDGs.

SDG #4 is formulated as follows: "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all". There are also corresponding targets: 12 years of publicly funded free and equitable primary and secondary education of good quality including at least 9

<sup>7</sup> The UNFPA, United Nations Population Fund (initially the United Nations Population Fund), established in 1967, is the largest source of international development funds for family planning and maternal and child health.

<sup>8</sup> The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, or simply UN Women, is an agency of the United Nations (UN). It was created to "promote gender equality and the empowerment of women worldwide".

<sup>9</sup> The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR or HCR in French-speaking countries), based in Geneva, is a program of the United Nations. Its original purpose is to protect refugees, find a "durable solution" to their problems and ensure the application of the 1951 Geneva Refugee Convention. [http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/ED/ED/pdf/FFA\\_Complet\\_Web-ENG.pdf](http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/ED/ED/pdf/FFA_Complet_Web-ENG.pdf)



compulsory years leading to relevant learning outcomes.

Specific targets are defined:

4.1 By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes.

4.2 By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education.

4.3 By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university.

4.4 By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship.

4.5 By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, and children in vulnerable situations.

4.6 By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of



adults, both men and men, achieve literacy and numeracy.

4.7 By 2030, ensure all learners acquire knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including among others through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship, and appreciation of cultural diversity and the contribution of cultures to sustainable development.

4.a Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all.

4.b By 2020, substantially expand globally the number of scholarships for developing countries in particular least developed countries, small island developing States and African countries for enrolment in higher education, including vocational training, and

communications technology, technical, engineering and scientific programs in developed countries and other developing countries.

4.c By 2030, substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries, especially least developed countries, small island developing States.

Thus, the Incheon Declaration defines the goals of education in a much more precise manner, with particular emphasis on inclusion and equity, gender equality, quality criteria in education for all (hitherto somewhat neglected), opportunities for lifelong learning and the relationship between education and the goals of sustainable development.

Conscientious minds may feel disappointment in the necessity to periodically reformulate the Education for All goals and that progress is too slow. They may even question the entire initiative as wishful thinking. Yet it is reasonable to affirm the notion of reiterating and specifying more and more principles to be taken up in the field by the educational authorities and NGOs engaged in this perpetual struggle. Progress is certainly too slow, but it occurs nevertheless and besides, what would the world be

like if the voice of international cooperation and human rights were no longer heard?

The Declaration of Incheon, the UNESCO document, *Rethinking Education*, and the UNESCO report, *Rethinking Education: Towards a Global Common Good*, represent for every educator whether engaged in school or in non-formal education, an inspiration and an irreplaceable guide.



## ANALYSIS

# The situation in Sub-Saharan Africa

By Guy MENANT

Former Inspector General of National Education - Secretary of REPTA



## Significant backlogs are accumulating

The HDI, the human development index used by the UNDP (United Nations Development Programme), simultaneously takes into account data on health, education and income. By integrating the main

factors of development it is possible to compare countries by assigning them a number between 0 and 1. According to their research there has also been a sharp increase in the world average for this index, from 0.558 in 1990 to 0.728 in 2017. Overall, life expectancy has increased, duration of one's

education is longer and incomes are higher. However, there are huge inequalities between countries approaching the maximum, such as Germany (0.936 in 2017), and the five furthest away which are all in Sub-Saharan Africa, such as Niger (0.354 in 2017). These inequalities are also a function of gender: in Sub-Saharan Africa, the average HDI for men is 0.567, compared to only 0.506 for women.

In sub-Saharan Africa, the three elements taken into account in calculation of the index are much lower than in countries with the highest HDI. Healthy life expectancy, estimated at birth, is 50.7 years in sub-Saharan Africa in 2016 compared to 73.4 years in France. The rate of students who drop out before the last year of primary education is 43% in sub-Saharan Africa compared to 5.9% in Europe-Central Asia. Furthermore, only 34% of the population aged 25 and over have begun secondary education, compared to 81% in Europe-Central Asia. Also alarming is the gross domestic product per capita which in sub-Saharan Africa is 4.5 times lower than the average GDP in Europe-Central Asia.

## More than half of the world's population is out of school.

Despite the dire state of affairs, significant progress has been made, particularly in basic education. In sub-Saharan Africa, the gross intake rate in the last grade of primary school has steadily increased from 54% in 2000 to 69% in 2018. But despite these efforts, sub-Saharan Africa remains the region of the world with the highest rates of exclusion from education.

By 2017, sub-Saharan Africa alone will account for more than half of the world's out-of-school population of primary school age. And this rate is increasing rapidly, from 41% in 2000. This trend is partly related to the growth of the school-age population, which is growing faster than anywhere else. But it is also related to reduction in the percentage of education allocation in the total amount of official development assistance (excluding debt relief), from 10% in 2010 to 7% in 2017.

## Low achievement of students in school

In addition, the performance of children in school is not satisfactory. In particular, the level achieved in reading remains low, even very low in several sub-Saharan African countries where the rate of children





having acquired the minimum skills at the end of primary school is less than 10%. On average, in French-speaking African countries, only 42% of students in Grade 6 possess the minimum skills, and this figure is trending towards a sharp decline.

### **French as the language of schooling**

Many factors explain this effectiveness deficit. One of the most striking is the use of French as the language of schooling starting from a child's very first learning experiences. Learning to read and write in a foreign language is a major obstacle and one that is beginning to be taken into account in several countries. For instance, the International Organization of the Francophonie, has set up the 'School and National Language in Africa' (ELAN Africa). This initiative has demonstrated in the field very convincing results by dual

instruction in the mother tongue and in French. Since its creation, REPTA has supported directly and through its member associations non-formal education structures engaged in bilingual education experiences particularly in Niger and Senegal.

In these two countries, the ministries in charge of education have conducted field experiments and in recent years widely deployed an instructional model using the mother tongue most represented in the region concerned. Students first learn to read and write in their mother tongue and then gradually French is introduced as the language of more formal schooling.

By this approach true bilingual capacity can be acquired, which is essential for access to digital networks. French is the fourth language on the Internet and nearly 60% of speakers of French are now on the African continent. However, we are still far from extending these bilingual courses to all students in French-speaking Africa as the obstacles are so many and varied. The perpetuation of the French-speaking world in Africa will not be without it.

### **Insufficient preparation in reading and math**

Another important factor is the role of preparation for reading and math



that can be provided by early childhood programmes before the age of entry for primary education. One of REPTA's member associations, "Bénin Vi Bibi", is very active in supporting community schools focused on early childhood in Benin . This is significant since it is in sub-Saharan Africa where the percentage of children attending these preschools is the lowest with only 42% compared to 93% in high-income countries around the world.

### **Long-term school attendance out of reach**

Mastery of basic skills is absolutely essential for everyone but insufficient preparation for starting a

career. Beyond the skills acquired at the end of primary education, secondary education is not only an asset but a necessity to access vocational training. The field structures that REPTA member associations support provides entry preparation and basic vocational training to students who have completed primary education but, due to delays passed the normal age to enter secondary school. Vocational training is a springboard for rapid integration into the world of work and out of poverty yet too often students drop out of school to engage in low skill labor as a means to support their families urgent economic needs. Once again this

illustrates how education and poverty are totally linked...

## New threats

The precarious position of populations is very evident within the countries concerned. This is because national economies are highly dependent on global flows of products and capital, yet poor countries are less self-sufficient and more vulnerable to changes. Crises of any scale or nature often have an outsized impact on these more dependent countries.

## The effects of the global financial crisis

The global financial crisis of the late 2000's slowed down the growth of external aid to education in sub-Saharan African countries. Yet on the contrary, greater efforts were needed to account for population growth while maintaining focus on catching up in quantity, quality and equality of education. This factor played a contributing role in the out-of-school rate stagnation that took hold from 2008 onwards, even though this rate had been previously falling steadily and significantly for many years. This slowdown in engagement between Northern and Southern States was felt at the level of organizations such as REPTA, for which it became more

difficult to find institutional financial partners.

## The role of terrorist groups

Other crises are more endogenous, even if they are fed by global economic and human imbalances. Several regions of the Sahel have been invaded by active terrorist groups. Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger are countries where REPTA has been very actively involved since its foundation, both directly and through its member associations. Close partnership relations have been established with educational partners in the field, resulting in the creation of "REPTA-countries". For several years they coordinated collaboration and exchange of practices between their member associations. But since the late 2000's, the French diplomatic services have explicitly advised against their staff visiting these countries especially in the sectors most affected and unless there are compelling reasons for doing otherwise. In fact, it is no longer safe or feasible for our volunteers to go there. Competent and motivated local trainers have been trained alongside our correspondents and could have taken over, but even for them it is dangerous to openly provide education services in areas where the terrorist risks are high. In Niger, the schools in the commune of Diagourou, whose second-



chance classes had been supported for years by the REPTA member association, 'Frédie: Life in Niger', had to close under terrorist threats.

### **Growing insecurity**

Growing insecurity is pushing people to seek refuge in less exposed villages. The reception of these migrants poses problems of accommodation and food, but also of schooling. Public schools, which are already barely able to cope with the growth in enrolments due to local demographics, are sometimes taken over by community schools managed and supported by organizations, with the help of outside partners. This is the case, for example, of "Aidons l'Afrique Ensemble", based in Burkina Faso, whose structures in the northwest of the country take in hundreds of refugees from the Malian border.

### **Impacts of the health crisis**

Added to all this was the health crisis of spring 2020. The magazine "Cooperative Approaches" devoted its May issue to the pandemic and

several of the articles highlight the paradoxes of the COVID-19 epidemic in Africa. With 1.3 billion inhabitants in 2020, Africa represents more than 16% of the world's population and as of June 23, it had only recorded about 300,000 cases (3% of the 9,130,000 worldwide) and 8,000 deaths (1.6% of the 473,000 worldwide) .

Admittedly, the epidemic started later than in Europe, but the African continent simply did not experience the extent of contamination spread that was feared. Nor did it experience the deadly saturation of hospital resources expected to be worse than that observed in better equipped northern countries.

In South America, the rapid growth in the number of cases and deaths indicates that the hot climate is not enough to explain the moderation of the pandemic in tropical Africa. The youthfulness of the population, compared to that of Northern countries is undoubtedly another important variable as well as the likely previous confrontation with other coronaviruses. Other factors have certainly also played a role, notably that frequent international travel only involves a small proportion of the African population located in the wealthy districts of cities and areas high in tourism. But perhaps the most significant ameliorating factor, increasingly



recognized, is that African states are more adept at fighting dreaded epidemics as recently exhibited by Ebola. This experience notably resulted in these countries taking early prevention measures, sometimes even before the first observed case such as border closures, travel restrictions, partial confinement in major cities and curfews. There has also been a rapid mobilization in local and even widespread family production of cloth masks as in South Kivu province in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

### **Indirect effects now feared**

From a health point of view, as a consequence of COVID-19 constraints there have been long delays in the systematic vaccination programs for young children. As is the case everywhere in the world, health services have seen a significant reduction and therefore in care while many other diseases are still active.

In more isolated areas, interruption of daily subsistence activities is simply impossible for the large part of the population as they lack sufficient cash reserves. In these cases food aid has been indispensable especially in the most disadvantaged neighborhoods. The relatively low impact of the epidemic fortunately allowed early easing of constraints.

But national economies are already heavily impacted because of their international dependence. The tourism sector which often accounts for a large share has been totally halted by the closure of borders. Exports have fallen as well as the price of raw materials. The capacity of states to support their businesses is not of the same order as in the countries of the North. Without a large-scale international solidarity effort humanitarian crises will be inevitable. Yet, the rich countries have just gone into debt at unprecedented levels in attempts to limit their own economic and social collapse.

### **Climate deregulation**

All this could almost make us forget about climate change whose effects have and will continue to be especially damaging for countries already exposed to desertification. A heightened international awareness was beginning to take





hold during the few months the economies of the most industrialized countries were at a standstill having very briefly reduced CO2 emissions. But now the absolute priority of all governments is to massively accelerate a return to growth which is inseparable from increased consumption of fossil fuels oil, gas and coal.

At most, we can hope for relocations that will limit the impact of transportation, motivated above all by the desire for greater independence in sectors that suddenly appeared strategic during the health crisis. However, the counterpart is a reduction in demand in poor countries, whose demographics and low-cost labor

were important assets in the global economy.

### Sustainable development goals falling out of reach?

It is unquestionably difficult to be optimistic and hope for a clear trend towards the reduction of inequalities of all kinds and on all scales in the decades to come. Specifically, the set of 17 sustainable development objectives will probably be out of reach by the set deadline of 2030. A fundamental reason is that they were conceived from the perspective of a world that could maintain accelerated economic growth as a means to eradicate poverty, hunger and live well in harmony with its social,

cultural and environment, both urban or rural. However, it is now necessary to take into stronger account that the planet's resources are not infinite. The economic models of development based on a continuous and if possible accelerated growth, considered as the only factor of production of wealth are to be revisited quickly.

Growth should focus on countries where the human development index is low compared to other regions of the world. In the countries where it is highest, it is imperative to cut back frenetic consumption incentive and to shift values, especially towards solidarity and mutual aid. This transition to sustainable global human development should really be the basis.

Technological innovations will make these changes more acceptable but they will not be enough if we do not reduce global energy needs and stripping natural resources. This will require radical changes in lifestyles and economic models in countries currently enjoying high GDP. This will only be possible if the principles of solidarity, global interdependence and responsibility towards future generations are more actively pursued by the populations most affected, today's youth.

This is certainly one of the major challenges of education - building global citizenship. Close relations between school populations in countries of the South and the North is one path towards facilitating deeper awareness of inequalities and the need to act jointly for sustainable well-being (see the article in this issue : Towards education for global citizenship).



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DOSSIER

# Achievements and Prospects for EFA in Africa

par Mamadou N'DOYE

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Education For All has been mobilizing education stakeholders from around the world and in Africa for three decades. Key questions regarding these efforts include: Has Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) been able

to achieve the goals? To what extent and why? What are the prospects?

In the following article critical evaluation of EFA policies help us examine the pilot implementation initiated by the Education For All

Network in Africa (REPTA) in pursuit of effective alternative approaches to achieve goals set by the international community.

## From Jomtien to Incheon: Growing ambitions and complexity

Structural adjustment policies applied in the 1980s had a disastrous impact on the most vulnerable strata and caused the social sectors in developing countries to stagnate or even regress.

Taking a completely different direction, the EFA movement initiated in 1990 at the Jomtien World Conference, committed to drive an inclusive approach to development of the education sector. It was subsequently deployed through the World Forum in Dakar in 2000 and the Incheon Forum in 2015. The achievement of the six goals for the first stage, considered accurately or not as too focused on access to primary education, led to expansion of EFA in its second stage with six new goals linked to the concept of basic education. In essence this laid down a foundation for lifelong learning breaking from conventional categories related to age or educational attainment. It also transcended the distinctions between formal, non-formal,

informal, in and out of school education and the distinctions between education and work. In the third stage EFA went further from an emphasis on quantitative measures towards more attention to qualitative equity- based features as reflected in the title of the Incheon Declaration: 'Towards inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all. In this third round with a single goal broken into 11 objectives EFA was less fractured and more innovative integrated under sustainable development goal #4 (SDG4) in the UN Programme 2030: *"Transforming our world through sustainable development perspective"*. It interacts with sixteen other SDGs and 158 objectives through a holistic approach where education is both the driving force and the object of the targeted transformation. Education participates in and has a "collective impact". All in all, the EFA goals, which were in fact ambitious from the beginning, have gradually become more ambitious and more complex. The question then is if they have been achieved?

## Mixed results at the global level and in Africa

The international response is based on a mixed overall assessment. On the glass half full perspective



progress can be viewed as more or less appreciable. For example, the net primary school enrolment rate in developing regions rose from 80% in 1990 to 83% in 2000 and to 91% in 2015, while by the same dates the overall number of out-of-school children was reduced from 105 million to 100 million and then to 57 million respectively. Parity between girls and boys has also improved significantly in terms of access at all levels. The literacy rate of young people (ages 15-24) increased from 83% to 91% between 1990 and 2015. From the 'glass half empty' view, recent data shows just how far the world still has to go. 175 million children aged 3 to 5 have no access to pre-school. 132 million girls are out of school, including 34.3 million of primary school age, 30 million of secondary level 1 and 67.4 million of secondary level 2. 44% of girls and 34% of boys (aged 10 to 19) from the poorest families have never been to school or have dropped out before completing primary education. More than 617 million children and adolescents of primary and secondary school age (6 out of 10) do not meet minimum proficiency levels in reading and math. These overall results, marked by significant equity and quality deficits, mask disparities between countries and regions of the world.

## What about Africa specifically?

The 2015 Global Monitoring Report reveals that only 1/3 of countries have achieved all the goals and that the majority of African countries are classified as far from achieving the goals. In fact, the performance of the SSA region is below the average for developing regions (DRVs). For example, the gross pre-primary schooling rate is only 22% compared to 39% for the DRVs. The net rates of primary school enrollment (80%) and primary completion (55%) are also lower (90% and 73%). This gap amounts to 16 points concerning the net enrollment rates for secondary 1 (66%/82%) and 2 (43%/59%). Only 0.6% versus 1% of young people aged 15-24 have access to technical and vocational secondary education. Yet these comparisons, which place SSA at the bottom of the EFA rankings of the world's regions, do not do justice to the relatively greater efforts and progress it has made, especially between 1999 and 2014. The pre-primary Basic Enrollment Rate (BER) doubled from 11% to 22%, the primary Adjusted Net Enrollment Rate (ANSR) gained 30 points (from 50% to 80%). Gender parity in primary school increased from 0.85 to 0.93 and in secondary school from 0.82 to 0.86. At all levels of the systems there has been a real

explosion of school enrollments which have almost doubled. As an illustration of these leaps, the number of children enrolled in primary school rose from 62 million to 149 million in the period 1990-2012.

However, this exceptional progress has still proved insufficient to:

(i) cope with the world's highest growth in the school-age population which is nearly 2% on average per year while in the rest of the world school-age populations were stagnating or re-building);

(ii) absorb the huge backlog. SSA was furthest from achieving the EFA goals: for example, only half of primary school-age children were actually enrolled in school in 1990.

To paraphrase Thandika MKANDAWIRE (2010), SSA ran while the other regions walked yet apparently this was still not enough to catch up. Beyond demography and historic tendency to lag behind, one must question what other challenges hindered Africa's education race and what responses did EFA approaches inspire?

## Challenges to EFA in Africa and political responses

In SSA more than elsewhere, EFA policies and strategies had to

respond to a demand for innovation as well as transformation.

## Externally imposed educational models

Without claiming to be comprehensive, one of the primary barriers to quality educational is that the education and training models established were not the product of internal development processes. Rather, they were imported from outside by colonization imposed and in direct contradiction to African traditions.

Moreover, in contrast to the EFA goals, these models were designed and targeted to minimize local alliances and structurally prohibit 'awakening the African masses'.

Thirdly, and particularly in the former French colonies, they were invested with a '*civilizing mission*' with linguistic and cultural assimilation that rejected the African languages and cultures which were reduced to 'dialects and folklore'.

Under the premise of universal education, the gap between the costs of these elitist models and the actual allocated resources was enormous and practically impossible for poor countries to bridge.



## What policies?

Faced with this situation it was challenging to discern which EFA policies and strategies should be pursued. The review reveals that for the most part there were two types.

### **Quantitative/additive EFA policies: Progress in access plagued by high dropouts rates and low learning outcomes.**

So-called quantitative/additive policies focus on increasing strategies to extend the existing education model to the greatest number. They thus focus on expanding access and ideally equity (understood as quantitative parity). Their main lever is increasing material and human inputs and use

cost-effectiveness measures to simply "do more with less".

These policies include vast programs to build and equip new classrooms, compulsory and free schooling policies aimed at massive enrollment of children, campaigns to enroll girls in school, the introduction of double-shift classes in populous urban neighborhoods and multigrade classes in rural areas with lower population density. In addition there was the recruiting of a large number of low-cost teachers such as teaching instructors, temporary teachers, volunteers, contract teachers, etc.

These policies enabled spectacular progress as outlined above and are credited with having opened school

doors to millions of children. However, having inherited the assimilationist and discriminatory factors of the colonial model, this approach could not satisfy the EFA requirements. Certainly, the relative insufficiency of financial resources is among the leading causes due to the high costs of the model. But the challenge of reaching the last quarter of the excluded population became even more difficult due to passive as well as active resistance, particularly of a socio-cultural nature. For instance Boko Haram ('Western education is a sin') is quite common as a resistance concept even in areas where the religious and terrorist expressions of the movement are not active.

From the viewpoint of costs and cultural conflict, it would be interesting to look at the 26 percentage point gap between the primary completion rate of English-speaking African countries (73%) and that of French-speaking African countries (47%). In any case, adapting to the model has remained difficult for many children. 91% of children who enter elementary school only 59% complete it representing a loss of 32 percentage points. In practice, one child in two of those who complete does not reach a sufficient threshold mastery of basic language and mathematical skills. If we consider respectively the areas of geographic

residence and socio-economic background, the achievement gap is 33 percentage points between urban and rural areas, and 45 percentage points between the richest 20% and the poorest 20%.

The accumulation of handicaps shows that the average primary completion rate of 59% is only 24% for the poorest girls and 29% for the poorest boys. This inequality in education is reflected in literacy: 70.4% of individuals from a household in the poorest 20% are illiterate compared to 23.9% of individuals from the most advantaged quintile; 59% of young people and 61% of illiterate adults are women. These results show that quantitative policies have not been able to resolve either the internal inefficiency of the systems nor the inequalities of success. Even more problematic has been adapting the model to meet the specificity and diversity of EFA needs.

### **Adaptation and correction policies: Little impact on quality and equity measures**

Critical analysis of these policies led to efforts to adapt and correct them by simply improving quality and equity measures, but to the exclusion of questioning the wider model.

The main lever of action has focused on intellectual inputs (curriculum,

teacher training and pre-school preparation of children for school) and teaching-learning processes/ procedures and school and classroom organization. These also include curricular innovations (approach by objectives, by competencies, by situations), innovative pedagogical strategies (constructivist, project-based, transformational), the use of new technologies, the rural expansion of quality education, targeting of girls and other adaptations of curriculum content (peace, environment, productive work, entrepreneurship, etc.) and "Africanized" textbooks developed to strengthen the quality and relevance of education. The adaptation of the model and the correction of its imperfections are thus a sum of adjustments, remedial measures and updates that are still not part of a sufficiently coherent, continuous and systemic approach to the transformation of the model in place.

While these policies have been able to bring some improvements in learning outcomes and in the adaptation of the content taught addressing realities and problems of African environments according to the most recent evaluations of learning, progress has been neither significant nor sustainable.

To conclude, the problems related to low retention, disparities in

access and success, insufficient learning outcomes and the linguistic and cultural unsuitability of the model have remained essentially the same over time since AFA launch in 1990 with the same impacts on the literacy level of the youth and adult population.





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**LINEs OF ACTION**

# The Contributions of REPTA

By Mamadou N'DOYE<sup>10</sup>



All the critical analysis presented in the previous article illustrates that while achievement of EFA in Africa certainly includes such policies, it must also go beyond to include perspectives for transformation of the model. This is not a task that can be accomplished in the short term,

and even less so in a day or blink of an eye.

## Setting a clear course

In order to move towards a longer term vision it is first necessary to set a clear course making universal the basic human right to education; one

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<sup>10</sup> Former Minister of Education of Senegal - Former Secretary General of the Association for the Development of Education in Africa - Honorary President of REPTA - International Consultant

achieved not simply through access but actual successful learning outcomes for all.

Next one must pose the question:

**What are the strategic options and actions required to achieve this?**

It is in these areas that REPTA's contribution has proven valuable not only in terms of novel ideas, but especially through pilot projects for change on the ground that make a difference. From the outset REPTA has focused its solidarity partnerships on Sub-Saharan countries by such presence fully announcing, *'this is where the school situation is the most dramatic'*.

### Transforming the school model

REPTA understood very early on the necessary transformation of the existing school model and that at the heart of a systemic architecture for transformation they must address the dual problems of inclusion, linguistic barriers and cultural factors. This led to forming two main strategic axes: 1) Placing priority on those commonly excluded from school (rural, poor, girls and women, working and street children...) and; 2) promoting bilingual education models (first African languages then French).



### Adapting to the excluded

Including the excluded does not require asking them to adapt to standards of established models but rather to adapting models to the specific needs of the excluded. For instance REPTA has been working to identify and remove barriers to participation. Gaps in educational services between the models and needs of the excluded are evident in physical aspects, cultural dimensions, expected learning outcomes and others. To address these issues there are a few requirements:

- Use proximity school maps with new cost-effective formulas for school management in rural areas with low population density;
- Integrate local linguistic and cultural heritage into the teaching/learning programs and processes, particularly through school/environmental community interaction;

- Make school organization, functioning and calendars more flexible for local adaptations to the needs and constraints of excluded groups. Such an approach reverses the colonial educational paradigm based on elitism, assimilation and conformity so as to bring about a new paradigm; one based on democratization, respect for different identities and diversification of learning opportunities to meet the needs of All. On this last point REPTA has explored the validation, mobilization and articulation of several formal, non-formal and informal teaching and learning modalities.

## The language issue

Concerning the language issue in particular, the use of an unfamiliar foreign language as the sole language of instruction imposes extreme hardship on African children from the outset. They are severed from lessons acquired in context of their native tongue and then called upon to pursue non-linguistic learning in a language they do not understand.

### Four goals

In its approach, REPTA has distanced itself from the assimilation objectives of colonial policy as well

as those seeking reversal/ substitution of radical identity through nationalism. It has grounded its approach on the priorities of EFA by setting four objectives for bilingual education which are to:

1. Facilitate initial learning at school through the study and use of the learners' first language as the language of instruction;
2. Promote successful continued subsequent learning through the acquisition and mastery of the second language, French, before it becomes the language of instruction;
3. Establish equity in educational success, particularly between learners from rural and urban areas as well as for those from disadvantaged and socially advantaged backgrounds;
4. Promote a sense of ownership of schools and the educative process by the surrounding communities.

### The results

In total, these strategic options for transformation, which have been tested and evaluated, have demonstrated that:

- The success rates of pupils in bilingual education are higher than those of conventional

schools operating solely in French. For example, an average success rate of 70% compared to 33% in Burkina Faso (ILBOUDO, 2003) or 78% compared to 40% in Cameroon in 2015.

- Bilingual education enhances the internal efficiency of the systems. For example, the promotion rates for bilingual schools are 99% compared to 75% for conventional schools in Niger (Nazam Halaoui, 2008). Similarly bilingual schools in Mali using this convergent pedagogy reduce grade repetition by 5 times and drop-out rates by a factor of 3 compared to conventional schools (World Bank, 2005). By reducing the incidence of grade repetition and dropping-out, it reduces unit costs accordingly. The same World Bank study in Mali illustrates that the cost per pupil for 6 years of elementary school is 27% higher in the conventional system than in the bilingual system.
- In addition to these positive results, which go well beyond the few French-speaking countries cited as examples, the powerful impact of these models can be more fully appreciated when one considers that their experimentation mainly involves children from the most

underprivileged groups as evidenced by regression analyses of the evaluations carried out.

## Supporting teacher professional development

REPTA has supported professional development of the key players, the teachers, by working mainly on adapting changes to the classrooms, the critical and central place of learning.

## Peer-to-peer exchanges and reflexive practices

Fostering exchanges between peers and reflexive practices on pedagogical experimentation directs them towards innovation, changes in professional practices and cultures and the qualitative transformation of education.

## The interactive whiteboard experience

In this regard we can emphasize the experience of interactive dashboards serving as a stimulating support for self-and interactive pedagogies as well as constructivist and transformative pedagogies.



## SDG4 Framework for Action: New Opportunities for Transformation

It is regrettable that the important contributions of REPTA and other NGO's oriented towards establishing a transformative educational model in Africa have not been widely realized. Nor have they been validated or implemented by those responsible for educational policies in Africa including bilateral and multilateral partners. The scope, goal setting and effectiveness of assistance aid merits on these points deserves a critical evaluation.

### The 2030 program

Nevertheless, it is welcome news that the 2030 Agenda and SDG4 Framework for Action are resolutely oriented around the philosophy of education transformation advocated for here and intimately linked with principles of inclusion and sustainable development.

Such an initiative provides an opportunity for REPTA to renew its commitment and deepen its contribution to the achievement of EFA in Africa.

### Huge stakes

The stakes are enormous for the continent in the 21st century. Not only has no country been able to

prosper without educating its people, but this truth is more forcefully asserted in increasingly globalized, knowledge-based economies and where rapid change renders knowledge and skills obsolete at an ever increasing pace.

### Lifelong learning

More than universal primary education and the eradication of illiteracy, lifelong learning becomes an imperative requiring the construction of learning communities and societies that break the academic monopolies on the transmission of knowledge. At stake for Africa, in addition to prosperity, social cohesion and living together is democracy and equality in citizen participation, health and peace, ecological balance and food security, enhancement of the demographic dividend and youth employment, cultural renaissance and building endogenous foundations for sustainable human development.

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## STORY

# Community kindergarten in the village of Aïdjedo, Benin

By Suzanne and Gérard DROZ - Founders of Benin Vi Bibi



At the request of REPTA this interview was conducted in the Fon language within the village community of Aïdjédo. The purpose was to trace the evolution of a community kindergarten from its launch and early implementation to its further development and longer

term sustainability. We were curious to understand what such a project brings not only to the individual children and families, but the entire village community. Here is their story...

- Our story goes back to 1999-2000: There are many small children in this village of Aïdjedo. They are looked after by older brothers and sisters so mothers can go about their business. The eldest are most often out of school. Deeply moved by this situation, the Beninese organization, Initiative Développement Pêche (ID Pêche) took a census of the children's condition and called meetings. Their deficiencies were noted as follows:
  - Schooling of young children is not provided as in the big cities
  - Need a way to provide childcare so mothers can pursue economic activities (fish market, gardening market, processing of cassava into gari, etc.)
- In 2005, the creation of a community kindergarten launched with the construction of a shed built from shaky construction materials. The women take turns caring for the children while the men ensured the shed is maintained in good condition.
- In 2007 the village mobilized to build a straw hut for the children whose numbers varies between 45 and 50. A volunteer teacher was recruited by the village and trained by ID Pêche.
- In rainy weather the children got wet under the straw hut so we tried to move them to neighboring houses. They have a meal at noon with the price set at 100 CFA but some parents have difficulty paying. It is the mothers who in turn prepare the meals and assist the teacher. We have created a small henhouse. The sale of eggs has enabled us to buy chalk boards, writing slates, and a little crockery for serving meals.
  - French students raised enough money to help build a bigger henhouse so the children were able to eat eggs.
  - The sale of the eggs also made it possible to buy others materials and to partially support the salary of a mistress who was congratulated because she came so regularly and did her job well.
- In 2013 the French town of Perreux-sur-Marne gave a grant for helping to build a permanent school building. Also ID Pêche built the restroom facilities and a young Beninese woman funded the water supply.
- All the children of the village go to school. They are awake, clean,



express themselves freely, wash their hands with soap, and speak words in French. They have good results when they arrive at elementary school making things easier for the teachers. They are not disoriented, are well behaved and never need to repeat their classes. We have changed the way we look at our children - they are treated more gently because they know a lot. The abuses inflicted in the past are diminishing.

- The elders are very happy and say that they could have made a better life for themselves if, in their time, they had benefited from such things.
- So the community kindergarten has made a difference in the village:
  - Both girls and boys go to school and are supervised there
  - Children no longer just hang around the village
- They have running water at school and toilets
- We, the mothers, are free to go about our business and women's activities are more successful
- The children feel fulfilled and work well at school
- The village has benefited from construction of a permanent building.
- The children eat a quality meal together at noon
- We, the mothers, have changed our way of life, the children make us aware of the importance of hygiene
- The children benefit from a monthly health check-up
- The parents meet twice a year to discuss the school's activities and its evolution
- Improvements will be made: The henhouse will be enlarged thanks to a grant from the French General Council from Val de Marne. Also a position of Animal Keeper will be created.
- This childcare and education initiative spanned years and involved a survey of the whole village. The survey revealed how community derived solutions to



their own problems and the corresponding initiatives evolved significantly over time. The way adults look at children has changed. And the story is not

over because the villagers are still thinking about what they could still do better for their school.

It's 2020 and the situation has changed. Thanks to solar panels financed by the town of Perreux-sur-Marne, the village elementary and high school students can now do their homework under lights and villagers can hold meetings in the evening while recharging their cell phones. REPTA has equipped the building with an interactive digital server that allows young children to produce sound, images, and start writing. The villagers also built an outdoor playground (with tires).

The Beninese NGO Initiative, Développement Pêche, supported by a show of international solidarity by Bénin Vi Bibi (Benin's Awakened Children [www.beninvibibi.com](http://www.beninvibibi.com)), is now a member of REPTA and has opened 25 community kindergartens in several fishing villages of southern Benin.

[www.beninvibibi.com](http://www.beninvibibi.com)



## STORY

# Second Chance Class in Niger

By Mauricette PIEL

Founder and president of the association "Fredie - Life in Niger"



## The origin of the project

Gabriel Cohn Bendit contacted two communities in Niger, in 2005, to finance and follow two classes: one rural, Diagourou, and the other urban, Oallam. Their association, attracted to the project, applied for a grant from the Regional Council of Basse-Normandie to carry out "the second

chance class" program over a four year period utilizing a four-year subsidy. They won their four-year grant.

The project offers opportunities for learning to those excluded from the government school system.

The education program has two parts: at school as well as in an apprenticeship for learning a trade.

The classroom learning (reading, writing, mathematics...) is completed during the first two years in the students' mother tongue while they also study French (the official language) orally.

A member from the "Group of Retired Educators without Borders (GREF)" trains the teachers who come from each of the communities.

## How the project works

The trade apprenticeship entails students going to work, beginning in the first year, with the various craftsmen who have agreed to participate in the project. The students choose a trade in which they wish to train. During the subsequent years, they frequent regularly the craftsmen's workshops according to a schedule their teacher arranges.

There are two important causes of students being excluded from normal government-run schools: either their non-registration at birth (if not registered, they do not legally exist, according to the government) or their participation in domestic work which prevents regular attendance at school (causing lateness, other issues ...).

Therefore, to overcome these two difficulties, during the four years, the



parents pay in small monthly installments the cost of a supplementary tuition, and when the student leaves the class, he or she is declared a legal citizen and can access government agencies.

It is agreed that if a student has a task to do at home, reports it to the teacher, and arrives at school after doing his or her homework, the student may still attend school.

Second chance classes have the additional advantage when compared to government classes of being of reasonable size; in Ouallam: 50 students, and in Diagourou: 29 students.

## Evaluation

This project ran from September 2006 to July 2010.

The results were mixed in Ouallam, the government recruited a teacher for the first two years. However, the teachers who followed did not really succeed in energizing their classes.

On the other hand, the craftsmen were delighted with the results of their working with the students. The students learned their trades well.

As for Diagourou, the results were satisfactory. All the students mastered reading and writing in their own language, 9 had reached the grade 7 entry level, and all knew the trade in which they had been trained. Satisfied parents said that this class should be called the two chances class since it allowed the children two possibilities.

In view of this success, the municipality asked to move this class to another village (Diagourou comprises 200 villages). As the policy of the Regional Council in France had changed, subsidies were no longer allocated to associations but to a decentralized cooperative (one that moved from commune to commune). The association itself agreed to finance this second class, only if the teacher agreed to move from the first to the second village, transporting with him the materials necessary for this new class.

For political reasons, the class started in September 2012.

These conditions were met, and 35 students attended the four years of classes.

15 students, after attaining grade level competencies, wished to proceed to enter grade 7. 17 would



look for jobs, and 3 joined grade 6 at the village's government school.

Given this success, the municipality decided to replicate this class in a third village, where 40 students enrolled.

Problems of insecurity disturbed the classwork last year, yet the balance sheet of July 2019, hinted that, overall, the results were positive.

The teacher provides time for students who have mastered reading in French to become tutors for peers who still have difficulty reading. The teacher has been trained in the use of Information and Communication Technology, but problems of access to energy prevented him from using an Interactive Numerical Chart.







## STORY

# The Imagine Socio-Educational Center in Kaolack, Senegal

By Maria SCHNEIDER WILANE

Founder and President of The North-South Imagine Association



The German association Imagine Nord-Sud e.V., founded in 2003, decided to maintain its ongoing projects in Kaolack and the surrounding area by building a socio-educational center, in 2012, on the outskirts of the city. Kaolack's population has exploded over the

past 20 years, outpacing the area's infrastructural capacity.

## The activities

Based on the observations made in previous years – the learning difficulties encountered by the students and the many premature school dropouts that followed – we



made a plan of action. Together with our partners from Imagine Kaolack associations, we decided to act "upstream" by creating a bilingual (Wolof-French) pre-school group, and "downstream" by providing sewing and literacy training for young girls and women with minimal formal schooling.

For four years, we have continued to develop these two activities with a motivated and stable staff, reinforced by young dynamic interns. Little by little, parents of students in the pre-school group began to ask us to continue with elementary school classes. This was in line with our own wish to create a bilingual elementary school, as we were aware that the school performance results in our neighborhood were catastrophic, just like the other neighborhoods with overcrowded classrooms.

## Learning difficulties

It is not easy for a child to learn to read and write in a language which they do not know. This is what is normally asked of children in

Senegal, whereas most children are socialized in one or sometimes two local languages, hearing French only very occasionally.

In this context, finding oneself in a class of more than 40 students - sometimes even twice as many, managed in "double flow", with a little more than half the normal schedule - greatly challenges both the teachers and the young children. All struggle with both French and the crowded circumstances. Dreamy or unmotivated students will quickly be "overwhelmed", foreign words will be repeated and copied without understanding them, and the content of the lessons will remain mysterious or blurred for a long time...or forever.

## Our choices

If the aim of school is to avoid training only an "elite" and, instead, to give basic knowledge and skills - on which the individual can build throughout his or her life - to *all* children, it must be transmitted in the everyday language of their environment. Since French remains the official language, common to many countries in Africa, and the language of secondary and higher education, it is necessary, at the same time, to give all children the maximum opportunity to acquire the bases of understanding and



active use of this important second language.

This is why we have opted for bilingual teaching of Wolof and French in our school. We teach all subjects in both languages. We begin reading and writing in French in the second year, when students will already know how to read in their own language, to facilitate this second language acquisition and to work on comprehension and oral expression in French before "attacking" the writing

## The results

At the beginning of the 2016-17 school year, we started with the first class of the elementary cycle of the CI, adding a new class every year. As a result, almost all children managed to read in Wolof by the end of the first year, whereas it

usually takes most students three to four years. The success of our approach has attracted more and more parents to our school, convinced of the efficacy of our methodology.

Many families were bringing children to our school who were in great difficulty - and sometimes on the verge of dropping out - even though they were in classes higher than our older children. We then added a second level to our not very large first grade class, and these students all progressed very quickly, even in French, thanks to the simultaneous teaching in Wolof!

In the meantime, other students have joined them, and we now have five classes - preschool and grades 1, 2, 3, and 4 - after four years of operation. This means that next year, the elementary cycle will be

complete, and we will present our 5th grade students to the exams for the Certificate of End of Elementary Studies (CFEE), which is conducted in French only.

This year, Senegal was obliged to close the schools as soon as the first cases of COVID 19 infections appeared. School, for now, will only open for exam classes (fifth grade, ninth grade and the final year of high school) at the beginning of June. Since most of our students come from families of very modest means, it was impossible to organize a continuation of the classes via the internet. We have some fears, under the circumstances, about the return to in-person schooling. But we can count on the motivation of our teachers and students to restart with renewed energy at the beginning of the next school year, because in addition to our bilingual approach, we have been able to create a joyful and optimistic work and school life atmosphere which we intend to reactivate.

As for the training of teenagers and young adults, we are continuing the sewing courses, with more and more options. For example, dyeing courses, and the making of handicrafts that can be sold in the handicraft village where our training and sales project for and with

disabled people of Kaolack will start soon



In both of our places of activity, the demand for training in and the use of computer resources is great. We hope to start courses as soon as the new school year begins in 2020-2021.

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NORT-SOUTH

# School exchanges and education for global citizenship

By Christophe LE ROHO

Inspector of Education Nationale, member of the REPTA bureau



*"I consider that Africa is quite simply the central, global, inescapable continent because it is here that all contemporary challenges collide. It is in Africa that part of the world's shift will be played out."*

--Emmanuel Macron, November 28, 2017, Ouagadougou

## A strong political impetus

A mission to modernize France's partnership policy for development and solidarity (mission letter from the Prime Minister dated February 27, 2018) was entrusted, shortly after, to Mr. Hervé Berville, Member of Parliament for the Department of

Côtes d'Armor. The French president's comments resulted in the drafting of a report entitled, "A common world, a future for everyone".

Within the framework of our actions under REPTA (Education For All Network in Africa), we had the opportunity and the pleasure to meet Mr. Hervé Berville in connection with this mission. This fruitful meeting allowed us to discuss the issue of schooling for African youth, especially the most disadvantaged, to share our vision on the challenges of education in sub-Saharan Africa and on ways to promote possible interactions between schools and associations on both continents.

In his report (page 83), we were particularly interested in one of the proposals: "Initiate the Forum 2030 Prize for young students". In the present article, we use this idea as a basis for moving towards an education for citizenship based on solidarity between African and French youth.

As the report emphasizes, youth must form the cornerstone of the partnership policy because we may envision no sustainable solution for tomorrow's challenges without a strong involvement of this part of the population. The action carried out in partner countries must

primarily benefit youths and must contribute to transforming them into the driving force of change.

In France, raising awareness among young people about the challenges related to the policy of partnerships and international solidarity is a central issue for long-term adherence to this public policy.

Africa's galloping demography and climate change, which is even more visible on the African continent, particularly around the Sahel, make it the area where all challenges will come to a head in the coming years. How can we involve these young people who are so diverse and so distant from one another, geographically and culturally? How to federate institutional and associative organizations to create a virtuous dynamism and move towards a common world, more respectful of both the ecological and cultural agenda? This gigantic continent, because of its diversity, carries within itself a very great cultural richness that should be understood in a multi-dimensional way. Finally, how can we exploit digital technology to build bridges between these young people? Since its creation, REPTA has used digital technology as a lever to enrich the in-service training of teachers, particularly in the non-formal network and, above all, to respond



to the demographic challenge facing the African continent.

Admittedly, actions are regularly carried out locally within schools, but they are very often dispersed. They are generally based on personal relationships between teachers and are driven by their own initiatives. These actions are all too often one-off and rarely long-term. They should be reinforced, better stimulated, coordinated and valued. Regular calls for projects at the national level can respond to this problem, thus helping to reach a large part of a generation of students, provided that the teaching staff and their students are supported both organizationally and pedagogically.

The "Forum 2030 Prize," proposed in Mr. Berville's report, aims to achieve this objective by rewarding students who win an annual competition for ideas or a call for projects on a theme related to the implementation of Agenda 2030. The implementation of this initiative would be a concrete way to make young people aware of the stakes involved in the policy of partnerships and international solidarity as part of their school careers.

As indicated in the report, ambitious objectives could be set in order to involve at least 1,000 elementary

schools, 500 middle schools and high schools, and 100 higher education establishments, across the educational spectrum, each year. This initiative at each level of schooling (primary, middle school, high school, higher education) would be the vehicle for getting students involved. As specified in the report, the organization of such a prize and the school module related to education for sustainable development would be the responsibility of the Ministry of Education.

## Projects around sustainable development

The circular of August 27, 2019 (MENE1924799) devoted to the ecological transition "New phase of generalization of education for sustainable development - SDE 2030" reinforces this momentum. Indeed, the Ministry of National Education and Youth has two objectives. The first is the education of all regarding the concept of sustainable development and respect for the environment. The second is to promote the effective participation in this transition by integrating the daily related actions of students and staff, creating a mass effect among 60,000 establishments. Thus, the school must be considered both as a place where commitment in this area is

learned as well as a locus of leadership regarding the agenda of environmental protection. The circular presents the concrete and sustainable actions to be implemented in 2019-20 in each school or establishment in favor of biodiversity: bird nesting facilities, organic gardens or vegetable gardens, etc.... They are all conducive to school projects in line with local contexts. The widespread use of eco-delegates, the rise of selective sorting, and the fight against food waste in school canteens and more generally in schools with the E3D label are multiplied by the reinforcement of these themes in programs and diplomas. What emerges is an educational sequence of ideas, programs, and rewards.

In addition, this circular also includes a European, international dimension. It is therefore necessary to link the local to the international. The most vulnerable populations suffer the first impacts of climate change while contributing the least to them. Understanding this fact should give even more meaning to the projects conducted within schools. Indeed, each individual act does not appear to have much impact, whereas the sum of each modest action, at the scale of a country, contributes demonstrably. Thus, school exchanges with schools or institutions in Africa, particularly

in the sub-Saharan zone, would render the impact of climate change more concrete for French students. This collective awareness within schools and institutions, within countries and across continents, would reinforce this positive dynamic: a virtuous circle.

### A better reciprocal knowledge of cultures undergirding the construction of an education of quality

By highlighting the knowledge and skills which students mobilize through projects based on cultural diversity, such school exchanges can also gain even more efficiency.

President Macron has initiated the event "Africa 2020 season", which aims to build a different perspective of Europeans regarding Africa, based on culture in the broadest sense. Mrs. N'Goné Fall, a Senegalese and architect by training, is the general commissioner of this extraordinary project. Indeed, it is the norm that annual events usually involve only one partner country in connection with France. This time, 54 African countries will mobilize simultaneously. The commissioner of the "Africa 2020 season" wants to create a dialogue between France and the African continent. She aims to forge lasting ties, promote co-

production partnerships, develop exchanges, and strengthen cooperation. Thus, the "Africa 2020 Season" should begin to make the 67 million citizens of France increasingly aware that they are increasingly face to face with the 1.2 billion inhabitants of the youngest continent on the planet.

Given the evolution of the Covid-19 pandemic in France and African, the Africa 2020 Season, scheduled to run from June 1st to the end of December 2020 throughout France, had to be postponed. The plan, now, is to hold it between December 2020 to July 2021.

A pan-African and multidisciplinary project, it focuses on innovation in the arts, science, technology, entrepreneurialism, and the economy. Education will be a cross-cutting issue for the sharing and transmission of knowledge. This unprecedented "season" will promote mobility, highlighting women in all sectors of activity, and targeting youth as a priority. The ambition of Africa 2020 is to create a global emancipation movement through a sustainable commitment built around the values of citizenship.

Therefore, kindergarten and elementary school classes are invited to participate in the call for projects on the theme "Africa -

today, tomorrow". This theme proposes that students work on the modernity of the African continent, on contemporary links between France and Africa, while imagining those of tomorrow. The work presented by kindergarten classes can focus on the diversity of the African continent, its lifestyles and their modernity, and around projects in music, the arts, or sciences. Elementary school students can address the issues of the plurality of Africa and its modernity through celebrations of its arts and lifestyles; the modernization of African territories and societies; the development of and the ecological challenging facing a growing continent; sports; and other dimensions.

All these calls for projects and their nature are hopeful. But how to create interactivity with African students in the 21st century? Digital tools are essential to build dynamic exchanges and, more broadly, the partnership relationship between students and their teachers across borders.

## What digital tools?

ENTs (digital workspaces) prevail in high schools and colleges but few are available in French elementary schools. The period of the pandemic confinement has made it possible to understand their vital

usefulness. For the first degree, ENTs such as ONE or Beneylu School would effectively contribute to bringing together not only the protagonists (by sharing their respective cultures through a variety of digital productions) but would also serve as a lever of progress, on the didactic level, for both African and French teachers. The same ENT shared between two schools located on two different continents is feasible and would facilitate the sharing of student work (in the form of videos, podcasts, text documents) and, more broadly, exchanges.

The use of virtual classrooms, via Zoom for example, has demonstrated its relevance in preserving interactivity between students, especially (once again) during the period of confinement.

In addition, the use of voice support is an excellent way to create interaction between students located at a distance. The most suitable tool seems to be web radio, which is very easily accessible. In addition, content in the form of podcasts can be listened to synchronously or asynchronously after downloading the program. This flexibility of use is certainly an asset compared to the "heavier" videos, always an internet challenge.

Other supports more adapted to bush schools exist and would make

it possible to build school connections. The NGO ED4Free, with which we have partnered, uses simple and robust technology based on a Raspberry nano server. The kit includes a video projector, the Raspberry nano server, a tablet and a solar panel. The device can be used in a mini-network thanks to a wifi connection, allowing one to connect several tablets simultaneously. In order to disseminate the students' work, all one has to do is connect to an internet hotspot and use the exchange space on the net created by the NGO for this purpose.

## Conclusion

All these calls for projects and discussions of their content generate hope. However, can we limit ourselves to national announcements, then transmitted through the usual communication channels, to fully reach the institutions, and especially the learners? Probably not. This requires the unfailing involvement of institutions and their actors but also of the participation of the widest possible swathe of civil society. The African slide show comes to mind as especially important as it would offer an engaging role to all the mobilized actors. Consequently and by territory, it would be advisable to federate in a more pronounced way

all the partners of the educational and associative world by leaning, if necessary, on the communities themselves for essential support. The problem of the complexity of coordinating these numerous actors is acute. Nevertheless, we have no doubt that the "Africa 2020 Season" event will meet the expectations of French and African youths, whose human values will be the foundation for their shared common future.

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 REPTA TODAY AND TOMORROW

# An increased duty to mobilize

By Guy MENANT<sup>11</sup>



## REPTA: Another educational model

*"Sub-Saharan Africa: that's where the situation is the most dramatic".*

In the early 2000's, REPTA - Education For All in Africa Network - based its project on this observation concerning education in Africa. Its founders created REPTA to support innovative experiences likely to

integrate the excluded, reduce extreme inequality, and to improve the very inefficient educational system.

To do so, it has resolutely departed from the dominant model inherited from the French school system, which – for linguistic, cultural, social, and material reasons – is fundamentally unsuited to the objectives of education for all.

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<sup>11</sup> Former Inspector General of National Education - Secretary of REPTA



These experiences have shown that it was possible to find meaningful solutions. However, the initial model continues to be applied in the majority of institutional schools. Quantitative advances have certainly been made by countries' educational systems, although progress remains insufficient. Sub-Saharan Africa still accounts for more than half of the out-of-school children of primary school age. Moreover, less than half of those who have reached grade 6 master the minimum expected skills (see the article by Mamadou Ndoeye in this issue).

## Many questions

REPTA is therefore faced with many challenges today.

The reason for its commitment is certainly still as strong as ever: progress in education for all continues to lag. However, this leads us to question this disappointing observation more broadly, especially since the first decade of this century was somewhat more favorable than the current period: a period in which crises and warning signals are now superimposed on the fundamental educational issues. Conditions have changed significantly, and new causes of exclusion from school have

appeared and will likely grow. At the same time, two of REPTA's lines of work are now more widely recognized and taken in hand by the institutional education systems of several countries: on the one hand, the use of mother tongues in initial learning, especially reading and writing, and on the other, the use of digital tools and resources.

We will look at these different points that currently structure REPTA's internal analyses and the courses of action that the network envisions.

## Act where and how?

First of all, let us recall that REPTA's founders conceived of it as a network.

Its function was intended to bring out, for the benefit of everyone's education in sub-Saharan Africa, convergences of points of view and possible synergies between different organizations and public bodies, civil society, and the business community.

In concrete terms, this has resulted in :

- the organization of meetings and symposiums, working meetings in France and Africa
- the finalization of partnerships with associations, institutions, local authorities and companies.

## In favor of those excluded from education

The actions that have been established engage with African educational structures involved in welcoming those who are often excluded from education: street children, young people who have dropped out of school, adults without training, and especially women. Among the excluded are also young children who have not yet reached the official age of entry to elementary school and whom the pre-school systems does not care for.

These structures are the result of civil society initiatives in village communities, local or regional associations, etc. By educating those who cannot benefit from institutional schooling, they contribute to reducing the rate of those who do not attend school; but their quantitative impact is difficult to estimate, as many of them escape official statistics.

These organizations come under what is known as the non-formal education sector. They do not depend on the hierarchy of the ministry of education and can therefore free themselves from programs and organizational frameworks. Their possibilities for adaptation and innovation are therefore much greater than those

within the formal public school sector.

In addition to quantitatively increasing the supply of education or training, and in some rural areas even constituting the only existing source of education, they specifically target the most disadvantaged groups who would be unable to pay school fees – fees always above zero even when public education is free.

### **Non-formal education**

This non-formal education, which some organizations designate as private non-profit education, denominational or not, operates thanks to constant searching for financial partners and the support of foreign donors and associations. (This issue contains descriptions of examples of such field structures which French REPTA-member associations support).

As a result, the non-formal sector is extremely diverse, ranging from rather destitute structures to schools with a level of equipment and quality of education that is significantly higher than that of the public sector.

In most countries a department within the ministry of education assumes responsibility for non-formal education. It generally does not have authority over these

structures but can play an important role in supporting and training educators. However, the budget of this department falls short of the requirements for providing in-depth action. Moreover, the non-formal education sector is virtually unknown to international cooperation programs and is often not included among the beneficiaries of support mechanisms.

For all these reasons, REPTA has focused its action on the non-formal education sector. This approach enables direct contributions to the care of those excluded from education, adapted responses to obvious local needs, utilization of often collaborative and community-based designs, greater freedom to experiment with innovations, and systematic openness to partnerships.

### **An international network**

As a result, REPTA has woven a network of partners in the non-formal education sector in several countries: Benin, Burkina Faso, Madagascar, Mali, Niger and Senegal. In several of these countries, the associations and NGOs concerned have even organized themselves into a local REPTA.

It is this sustained commitment to the non-formal education sector that



constitutes the originality of REPTA. And because it thus meets a need, it fully justifies the continuation of its action.

## A mission of accompanying and facilitation

REPTA is not intended to provide financial support to its African partners. Its mission is to identify and suggest solutions, to facilitate exchanges between peers, foment mutual support, and to accompany the evolution of pedagogical methods and tools.

## Conferences and training courses

REPTA organizes colloquia in countries such as Niger, Burkina Faso and Benin. It develops its programs during field missions, in contact with educators and their students. REPTA often provides training sessions during these missions.

The field partners' experiences constitute the central feature of these training sessions. In Niger, for example, learning to read in one's mother tongue was at the heart of the "second chance classes", which assisted out-of-school children with truly significant success.

## Proposal of digital tools

In all these countries, REPTA has advocated the use of digital tools to enrich the educational process, often devoid of any support, with sound and visual documents. Laptop computers and video projectors play key roles. REPTA provided an interactive board to directly involve the students and familiarize them with the handling of computers. The interactive whiteboard also prevented the teacher-educator from being glued to the computer keyboard, a well-identified shortcoming of the teacher's use of a computer until the tablets appeared.

## Evaluation of practices

These missions also allowed a follow-up and evaluation of the evolution of practices after the trainings that preceded them. As far as digital media are concerned, they clearly showed the limits of the appropriation of technical tools for autonomous daily use. Regular training sessions would have been necessary. A few potential trainers had been identified on the spot, but other problems quickly emerged: maintenance difficulties and lack of pedagogical resources adapted to the local context. The experience underscores how essential field missions remain.



## New challenges

REPTA's member associations, which have their own sources of funding, particularly because of their territorial anchorage, succeeded in continuing to carry out regular missions among their partners in the field. However, growing insecurity in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger has, in recent years, restricted or even prohibited access to the villages where the educational activities take place. In addition, since the COVID 19 pandemic, international travel will certainly remain subject to constraints, even after the resumption of air transport; and, understandably, local populations remain wary of the influx of foreigners given the public health crisis.

For its part, REPTA has drafted a project for resource centers that would guarantee the autonomy of the local network of non-formal educational organizations. The facilitators of these centers would



take over the action of REPTA, providing advice and maintenance, as well as organizing the sharing and collaborative production of educational materials (especially the digital kind). These facilitators would receive initial training and a small editorial team would be set up. In particular, REPTA would make available the digital bank of images and sounds that it created a few years ago for inclusion in software supporting the learning of reading in several national languages in Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and Senegal.

For the moment, this project has not received financial backing from the funders REPTA has approached. Because of its vocation as a national and international network, REPTA first contacted the Agence Française de Développement, which advised it to join other organizations to present a joint project.

A one-off pilot operation centered on the town of Kaolack in Senegal was presented to the municipality of a major city that has long been involved in partnerships with Kaolack. This time, however, the pitfall was the lack of a presence on the territory of the French municipality.

Other more modest projects were proposed in collaboration with REPTA member associations. One of

the obstacles, then, was the difficulty of guaranteeing self-financing in the long term for the action on the ground, thus ensuring the sustainability of the system.

## Continue otherwise

Fundamentally, REPTA must return to its initial vocation of bringing together and federating the different categories of partners that are essential to the success of an idea: African field organizations that express a clear need, the stakeholder national institutions, associations and NGOs that propose solutions, as well as the funding agencies and sponsors.

## Communication campaign

REPTA is therefore designing an external communication campaign. Based on face-to-face brainstorming sessions, on the model of those who built the initial REPTA network. it will focus on key issues, such as the persistence of non-schooling and illiteracy, the persistent obstacles to the use of national languages as a precondition for true bilingualism, and the lack of awareness of the crucial role that the non-formal sector plays.

Moreover, during the general health containment of this spring 2020, remote debate platforms have become commonplace. Debates will continue in this online form, as they

are simpler to organize and easier to integrate into partners' agendas.

## A resource portal

At the same time, the REPTA site is becoming a resource portal for those interested in education for all Africans. The portal includes reference documents, links to major international institutions, examples of best practices, and teaching materials ... To overcome the obstacles that make it very difficult to organize missions, a training platform has been created on a Moodle site; a first module has been made available to association leaders, providing a series of steering tools as part of an autonomous training course.

## Resource centers

For this, on-site missions remain essential.

REPTA therefore relies on recent missions, as well as the close relations and direct contacts that its member associations have maintained with their African partners.

REPTA thus maintains its project of building and maintaining a multi-country network of cooperative resource centers for the facilitators of non-formal education institutions in sub-Saharan Africa. Two pilot sites



are envisaged with two REPTA member associations:

- In Benin, with the association Bénin Vi Bibi: it supports the existing community education center in Séougbato, which welcomes schoolchildren at the end of the day to assist them with their homework; training is also provided for village women in literacy, health, birth control, management, as well as in first aid skills;
- In Senegal with the association Imagine Nord-Sud, at the non-formal socio-educational center in Kaolack: the organization takes in excluded and disabled children for pre-primary and primary schooling, as well as young girls for sewing classes.

REPTA's initial planned contribution was to increase training for one or more trainers and to provide additional digital equipment, but it will in fact be built with the managers of these centers during distance work meetings in September 2020.

Contacts are under way for a wider platform of organizations to carry the project forward and propose it again to donors, notably AFD, during coming rounds of grant proposals.

### Interactive radios

REPTA is currently exploring another course of action. In several of the countries where REPTA intervenes – Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger – children in areas exposed to terrorism constitute a new category of those excluded from education. One of our members, an inspector in charge of a primary education district in Brittany, accompanied the experimental use of a web radio in schools and then, this spring, as a support mechanism to ensure pedagogical continuity during the pandemic confinement period.

Most interesting, a possibility emerges to articulate a mobile web radio studio, a traditional Hertzian radio, along with telephone networks, to launch interactive radio sessions.

A project could be built with partners in Burkina Faso, where interactive radio broadcasts are a very established tradition. School programs could be broadcast to refugees from Niger whose schools have been closed under threat from activists (see Mamadou Ndoeye's article in this issue: "Boko haram"

means "Western school is a sin"). Radio sets are plentiful and within everyone's reach. In less exposed areas, remote sessions could be organized, and telephones would allow interaction with the program host.

The same inspector initiated exchanges between students from a school in his district in Brittany and the socio-educational center in Kaolack, Senegal. Documents illustrating cultural specificities and environmental characteristics are shared on a website.

These relationships are undoubtedly requiring further development, and even systematization. Today's children and young people must learn to know each other, to understand their differences, and to feel collectively involved in the emergence of a world that is resolutely and necessarily based on solidarity (see in this issue the proposal of an education for global citizenship).



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MEETING WITH...

# Roland Daval



*The excerpts in italics are from the REPTA educational project*

**Roland, I knew you when you were General Delegate of the Eclaireuses et Eclaireurs de France<sup>12</sup> (EEDF), then later when you took responsibility for the selection and training of volunteers for development at the Association Française des Volontaires du Progrès (AFVP - The French Association of Volunteers for**

**Progress), but how and when did you cross the path of REPTA?**

Indeed, both of us have taken on important responsibilities in the associative life, especially in Scouting, to which I feel personally very indebted. If I hadn't crossed paths with the Eclaireuses et Eclaireurs de France during the four years I spent in my youth at the

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<sup>12</sup> Eclaireuses et Eclaireurs de France is the non-denominational branch of French Scouting.

teachers' training school, and if I hadn't been allowed to take on responsibilities very early on, I would probably not have had the chance to give the same meaning to my life and to fulfil myself in an exciting professional career. Associative life is rich, above all, in human relations.

It should also be remembered that Scouting has been particularly involved in the creation and promotion of the AFVP, hence the opportunity for you and me in an exciting adventure in international cooperation and solidarity.

In fact, I crossed paths with REPTA when I served as Director of Volunteers at the AFVP at the time. Indeed, Gabriel COHN BENDIT – whom I had known for a long time because I had worked with him in various working groups and commissions devoted to international solidarity – asked the AFVP to get involved with other associations in the creation of REPTA.

I therefore represented the AFVP and quickly became involved in creating the pilot project that, among other things, would draft the statutes of the association and its constitutive charter.

Already involved in REPTA and its projects, when I stopped my professional activity in 2007, I

pursued this commitment in a personal capacity. I currently am the treasurer of the network.

### **What interested you in REPTA's associative project?**

The double challenge that REPTA has set for itself has always interested me:

- To act and mobilize human and financial resources to contribute to educational access for everyone in sub-Saharan Africa: countries I knew from my AFVP missions.
- To develop partnerships and networking to act in the service of this mission.

Naturally, given my initial training as a teacher and the associative responsibilities that I have exercised, particularly in Scouting, I immediately shared what REPTA affirms as the first priority in its educational project: *"The mother of all reforms is education for a virtuous economic development, a development of critical thinking. An educated population will also make it possible to have a better controlled and desired birth rate, to be better equipped to face health problems, to avoid the traps of obscurantism, and ultimately to aim for and live in a world at peace".*



Another important choice of REPTA that I also shared is to act towards those excluded from school, for whatever reasons, who are both many and too numerous:

- *Rural people, because the villages are too isolated and too far away to be able to group children together in a school.*
- *All working children. Some school children leave school prematurely without basic skills, especially without having learned to read, for various reasons (working, looking after the youngest children in the family), others have never been to school and work to live and survive.*
- *Girls who, for cultural reasons, are the largest subgroup of working children.*
- *Preschool children, whose early care prepares them for learning, especially acquiring language skills, freeing their young mothers to attend training sessions and engage in income-generating activities.*
- *Adults who were unable to attend school during their childhood. They need access to classes teaching reading and writing.*
- *Street children, a category that is growing in the big cities of Africa, as in the rest of the world. They*

*often refuse school but want to learn to read and write.*

- *Children in crisis zones or refugees displaced by terrorism, war or climate change.*

### **REPTA is a network. So what are its methods of intervention?**

Faced with the challenges of access to education for all, acting alone in its own corner, even with quality, will not achieve reasonable and relevant goals.

Searching for complementarities; acting together with shared values and objectives while not excluding (on the contrary) the specificities of every one; and sharing experiences and promoting successes: these are the many missions that REPTA has set for itself while developing a network of various kinds of actors. This network includes associations, local authorities, companies and corporate foundations, individuals, both in France and in the African countries, where various structures share the REPTA project.

However, after more than 15 years of experience, it is clear that this challenge of working in a network is far from being a reality even if many experiences attest to the validity of such a choice. It is still relevant to take up this challenge by releasing many brakes. In particular:



- Working in a network and in partnership means being able to devote human time, and associations – relying solely on their volunteers – do not always find the necessary strength. This is also the case of REPTA itself, which was able to act more vigorously when it had a teacher seconded by the French Ministry of Education for a few years.
- This human time, especially when it is voluntary, is difficult to include in the costs of a project, even if one might set a value on volunteering. REPTA, which first wanted to be a network, has had to get involved as a project operator to find the necessary funding to implement its missions, but too often such efforts work to the detriment of the time required to develop and coordinate the network and to promote its members' actions.
- This situation is even more true in African countries where REPTAs have been created which, due to lack of resources, face difficulties in acting better and together.
- The organization of territorial policies in France – as an example, the reform of the regions – weighs on the work of a national network, as the orientations in terms of cooperation, do not integrate the issues of access to education. Moreover, the projects that REPTA presents are often considered inadmissible because

the association does not have its headquarters in a given region.

- As far as companies are concerned, their commitment depends first of all on the willingness of leaders who want to ensure the social responsibility of the company. Committed leaders change and often everything has to be rebuilt. Corporate foundations, and this is naturally strictly their choice, define their own fields of intervention which do not always correspond with the issues concerning access to education.

**Africa, and particularly French-speaking West Africa, faces great difficulties in welcoming all children into the school system. What are the causes of this situation, from your point of view, and how can REPTA contribute to the emergence of new solutions?**

Beyond the financial and human resources that still need to be mobilized with the help of the international community, in many countries the educational model and pedagogical practices need to be reexamined, which indeed should happen naturally everywhere.

Only the official national education system will not be able to achieve this, since sub-Saharan Africa must also provide basic education to an

ever-increasing number of young people.

Mobilizing non-formal education actors alongside the school becomes a necessity. Some African countries have created ministries of non-formal education.

In order to contribute to the development of education for all in Africa, REPTA, a player in non-formal education, has adopted various modes of action:

- *To participate in the development of basic education and vocational and technical training, while respecting and complementing public policies.*
- *To promote the networking of actors of various natures (international solidarity organizations, companies, local authorities, public and para-public institutions) intervening or wishing to intervene in the educational field.*
- *To organize debates between members and to create links with other existing networks for education for all (in particular African networks).*
- *To propose work paths, in particular for alternative approaches.*
- *To promote, make known and valorize concrete experiences*

*and to participate in them if necessary.*

- *To contribute to the effective networking of actors of various natures so that they may carry out projects together.*
- *To give opinions and advice in response to requests.*

**Do African countries that are poor and lack resources have the means to generalize access to a school corresponding to the model imported by colonization, or is it necessary to invent other school models represented, for example, by community schools?**

In addition to the insufficient or non-priority resources allocated to education, the model imported by colonization must be re-examined because it does not demonstrate its relevance and effectiveness.

As an example, REPTA has mobilized for the implementation of bilingual education: learning the basics, writing and reading, in one's native language (linguists have translated all local African languages into written form) and gradually introducing, first orally, French, which is the official language. The particularly positive impact on children's academic performance and their retention in an educational program is well established. Although these

pedagogical practices are developing in more and more countries, much remains to be done.

*Teachers are generally reduced to the role of pedagogical executor. It would be important for them to organize themselves into pedagogical movements to invent the school that suits the socio-cultural environment in which it is located. This also implies support, because keeping a movement alive with a newsletter and meetings, without help, poses very difficult problems to overcome.*

*The deployment of information and communication technologies can be a powerful lever to significantly improve the quality and effectiveness of education and training. Depending on the location, different means can be used. Resource centers can provide access to the Internet to download teaching materials, exchange with peers or trainers, and borrow equipment. Electrification of classrooms with solar panels can power laptops, LED video projectors and even interactive digital boards. For these three types of equipment, there are solutions adapted to the context.*

*The generalization of cell phone networks also opens up important possibilities. For very isolated audiences, several media can be combined - telephone, radio and*

*web radio – to create interactive sessions.*

**REPTA focuses on helping children excluded from school, i.e. children already engaged in handicraft or agricultural work because of the poverty of their parents. How can we create educational structures capable of providing education to this category of children? What is REPTA's experience in this field?**

In Burkina Faso, Niger, Senegal, Benin, Madagascar, ..., REPTA has supported projects that take into account the reality of a territory and its inhabitants: adapting to the rhythm of seasonal life, developing

projects of itinerant classes that accompany nomads, and working with local artisans...

*For those who work, there must be facilities outside of working hours or, for street children, at a wide variety of times. It would be necessary to set up small pedagogical units adapted to these specific needs, so that they can have access to education for all and thus have the means to act to benefit from better working conditions, hygiene and safety. For girls, they require support so that they can free themselves from certain tasks such as childcare. We must imagine day-care centers for*



*children for whom the mothers would take turns taking care of them, which would free each of them, at other times, to go to school.*

**I read in REPTA documents a reference to mutual teaching which was practiced in France in the 19th century and which could be a solution to manage classes of 100 students as they sometimes exist in Africa. This interests me because it corresponds to the use of peer-to-peer tutoring practiced for example in Freinet classes, a cooperative approach. Does this correspond to a practice of REPTA or its partners? Do you practice other cooperative approaches? As we noted in issue 3 of *Approches Coopératives* devoted to educational reform, schools today tend to adopt methods that were previously the prerogative of non-formal education, i.e. youth movements such as EEDFs. I am thinking of teamwork, peer-to-peer tutoring, discovery activities in the environment, student participation in setting objectives, choosing activities, evaluating results. Is REPTA committed to this direction? Has it been able to draw on the experience of non-formal education movements such as Scouting to strengthen the quality of teaching?**

In its educational project, REPTA, which is active in the non-formal education sector, thus formulates its

own vision to act in the service of education for all:

*"Classes in large cities will continue to be close to or above 100 students. If a class of 100 in preparatory classes seems crazy, a class of one hundred with 25 large, 25 small and 50 medium [students], which would be divided into five groups of twenty comprising 5 large, 10 medium and 5 small can allow a class project where the teacher relies on the older ones to work with the younger ones. This is what in the 19th century was called mutual teaching and today is called multigrade classes. Many countries use them in rural areas".*

The experiences presented in this issue of *APPROACHES Cooperatives* in Niger, Benin and Senegal illustrate the commitment of REPTA member associations. Although the projects are not strictly based on a cooperative form, the choice of associations is very close and all the actors involved in the projects: teachers, educators, craftsmen, various technicians, ..., are fully associated as authors and actors essential to the success of such projects.

Moreover, all this is based on the experience of the women and men who are involved in REPTA and who all come from and are involved in the associative life, particularly in



popular education, including Scouting. It is this experience that makes the richness of the actions implemented.

**How did REPTA evaluate its objectives and modes of action to respond to the changing situation in West Africa, I think of problems such as violence, jihadism, the Covid epidemic, etc.?**

Indeed, REPTA is today confronted with new difficulties: jihadism, violence, for example, the recent attacks against ACTED militants in Niger, no longer allow us to go on the spot to act with and alongside our partners in Sub-Saharan Africa, to set up trainings, times of exchanges and meetings. And yet, nothing really replaces this necessary proximity, this direct meeting for the creation of high quality human relations.

Let us also add to the problem of areas occupied by jihadism, the closure of schools and the prohibition of access to an education that does not depend on the dominant religion. In addition, entire populations had to be displaced, moving to new refugee camps.

Today, REPTA is forced to revisit its practices, working at a distance via various distance communication tools. As an example, a Moodle site for distance training is under

construction and REPTA activists will be able to mobilize to accompany and train at a distance.

The impact of the Covid epidemic will also weigh heavily. Indeed the restrictive measures of displacement, the difficulties people face to find their daily resources through trade, lead today to new food shortages and increased poverty. Such situations exacerbate health and educational problems, as is often the case. But pursuit of better education, though, will be a poor relation and far from the daily concerns of families given these kinds of regional crises. It should be noted, however, that in the face of this situation, the World Bank, through its local agencies in Africa, is mobilizing resources to support projects in the field of education.

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**To learn more about REPTA:**

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