



**Launching of Academics Across Borders (AAB) Initiative
21 to 23 November 2005
UNESCO, Headquarters, Paris**

Report of the Rapporteur General

The Academics Across Borders Initiative, approved in UNESCO Programme and Budget for 2004-2005, was launched at UNESCO Headquarters during 21 to 23 November 2005 in an international meeting attended by the higher education community, permanent delegations to UNESCO and representatives of various agencies and organizations.

Professor Georges Haddad, Director of the Higher Education Division, warmly welcomed all delegates from various countries of the world. In his opening remarks he pointed out that the concept of AAB grew out of debates of the World Conference on Higher Education that was convened by UNESCO in 1998, and was reiterated in subsequent conferences in higher education. According to Georges Haddad, one of the important impacts of globalization is the greater emergence of action-based opportunities for higher education to make more productive use of human and material resources. Institutions of higher education should move towards the frontiers of knowledge with a view to creating advancement and progress of humanity. And, the search for the frontiers of knowledge is of necessity connected with developments in all respects. For him the logical and rational development of our thought processes must take into cognizance democracy, freedom of expression, equity and justice, including the social, economic and cultural components of our society, working with an acceptable and desirable code of conduct which is equally and morally correct. In so far as production of knowledge is concerned, we need to have a mind-set and a committed respect for research.

While globalization has brought opportunities in the teaching of higher education, at the same time there is also a price that one has to pay, in terms of increasingly added costs to these opportunities and, inevitably, the real windfall gains benefit those who can afford to bear those costs. Thus globalization also has its challenges.

Professor Haddad noted that at this stage, we must recognize the limitations of many developing countries in this new era to access knowledge and to share experiences in new technology. To this crucial end, UNESCO thought it worthwhile to foster the development and application of the Academics Across Borders Initiative as an important strategy with the potential to bring together various types of resources for university capacity-building in developing countries.

Today new technology can help to accelerate development across the world. Moreover, the integrated application of mathematics with science and technology is of immense value to any education system. Prof. Haddad ended his remarks by thanking the UK Ambassador for technical and financial support to the launching of AAB.

His Excellency, Mr Tim Craddock, Ambassador and Permanent Delegate of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to UNESCO offered his warm greetings to all participants. He stated that the year 2005 has been significant for Africa. He expressed the hope that the Meeting would identify specific ways to move the AAB (Academics Across Borders) Initiative forward in 2006-2007 through a holistic approach to Education as a lifelong process – and beyond Primary Education which has dominated the minds of some donors in the past. The UK supports the AAB Initiative and would like to have other countries pursue this undertaking. He stated that this UNESCO Initiative will, undoubtedly, create valuable expectations and is well situated to contribute to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. There will be huge increases in the amount of assistance available from donors over the next few years. All aspects of education in the poorest countries must be given critical attention in order to meet the MDGs. Issues such as the brain drain from Africa have been highlighted in the report this year from the Commission for Africa. He further stated that twinning and networking have an important role in strengthening higher education capacity. Ambassador Craddock called for the meeting to be practical and results-oriented. Discussions should be centered on how AAB should be developed to the benefit of universities in developing countries with UNESCO acting as a catalyst. It should also look at revitalizing existing schemes through partnership arrangements.

Professor Norihiro Kuroda, Deputy Director, Centre for the Study of International Cooperation in Education (CICE), Hiroshima University, Japan, welcomed the Academics Across Borders Initiative. He mentioned that the joint Africa-Asia Dialogue is being supported by CICE. In a brief description of CICE, he stated that the programme areas of the Centre include: a) research and development; b) policy analysis and recommendation for the implementation process, and; c) compilation and proper dissemination of useful and necessary knowledge, and supports a modus operandi of joint project execution. For him it is desirable to have sustainable cross-border sharing of experiences in order to bridge the knowledge gap that we are witnessing in educational development among a number of nations. There is need to stress a self-reliant approach to basic education development in Africa. This should lead to a productive strategy of research and reflection enabled by collaborative networking between African and Asian universities.

Self-reliance compounded with a sense of ethics and commitment can help us to develop positive values that include: a) a truly visionary and pro-active approach, b) priority to human development in a holistic manner, c) opportunities for ownership of policies and development strategies and implementation procedures and processes, and d) less dependency on donors.

Mme Aïcha Bah Diallo, Adviser to the Director-General on Africa, expressed her honour to address the Delegates on behalf of Mr Nouréini Tidjani-Serpos, Assistant Director-General for Africa, UNESCO, on the occasion of the Launching of the Initiative “Universitaires sans frontières”. This Initiative among other things, she said, will be responding to pertinent questions related to education and research in Africa. This is the evidence of the commitment of UNESCO towards the development of the African continent. In her keynote address she made reference to the President of South Africa, H.Exc. Mr Thabo Mbeki who, in 1999 stated that: “If the next century ought to be that of Africa, the one of economic and social progress of the African people, distinguished by peace and sustainable development, then the success of this enterprise depends on the achievements of our education systems”. She also referred to the BRED A report, entitled Dakar+5 (June 2005), which stated that higher education, during this last decade, has known constant progress with respect to increase in knowledge compared with other levels of teaching.

The level of students for every 100,000 inhabitants has gone from 232 in 1990/1991 to 449 in 2002/2003. In spite of this achievement, higher education is still confronted with various predicaments related to: equity of access, relevance, financing the status of the researcher and that of the teaching profession as well as low efficiency output with respect to the changing economies of society in this era of globalization.

For Mme Aïcha Bah Diallo, the cooperation of UNESCO with Africa rests on the policy decided by the Africa Union, namely through NEPAD together with various African organizations. The strategic action plan of NEPAD includes establishment of science and technology forums and the reinforcement and networking of centers of excellence. Such a strategy will contribute to the pillars for the promotion of inter-African cooperation in the field of human resources development and in science and technology. These centers of excellence can create strategic linkages with the Academics Across Borders Initiative.

Mme Aïcha Bah Diallo noted that the sharing of knowledge and expertise in the context of the network already set up by UNITWIN/UNESCO Chairs, and now with this new Academics Across Borders Initiative, will promote the utilization of African expertise for the needs of the African continent. AAB will reduce the brain drain and promote the contribution of the African Diaspora towards the development of African human resources. The use of new information technologies (ICTs) and communication (NTIC) is a tool that we cannot afford to avoid in so far as policies governing higher education by the Africa Union are concerned. The use of ICTs is fully supported by partners like UNESCO, the Economic Commission of Africa (ECA) and the African Development Bank. Mme Aïcha Bah Diallo also mentioned the African initiative of Mr Tony Blair, the Prime Minister of the UK, who is providing worthwhile opportunities for African educators and support to science and culture. The Academics Across Borders Initiative should benefit from the pledge made by the Prime Minister Blair.

Mr Peter Smith, Assistant Director-General for Education reiterated the objective of UNESCO support to strengthen African universities through the AAB Initiative - with the idea of developing a 'model' to strengthen other universities – as universities that are strong and stable lead to strong and stable countries. Universities are the place where free speech is rightfully respected. Quality higher education is of paramount importance as it: a) supports all the sub-sectors of education, b) ensures the development, and, c) conducts research that is essential to future developments. Universities are central places where the momentum of economic and infrastructure planning and execution are truly contingent on a paradigm that will sustain progress and achievements on scholarly continuous human endeavour. The AAB networking is to strengthen existing initiatives and organizations, which include inter-regional communication strategies. The inevitable outcomes of this Conference will assist and support UNESCO in strengthening of its strategic initiatives for the next 8 to 10 years.

A very strong message of support for Inter-university cooperation came from the NEPAD Secretariat, which spoke on behalf of the AU and NEPAD – and called for a regional and sub-regional strategy of international cooperation and collaboration through dynamic education policies, which together with the international community would bring about a Renaissance in Africa. Professor Mzobz Mboya, of the NEPAD Secretariat for Education and Training Youth outlined a strategy being advocated by the AU and NEPAD for Inter-regional University Cooperation through Regional/Sub-Regional initiatives, which include: regional initiatives such as teacher training and teacher development through Open and Distance Learning in Africa, UNISA (University of South Africa), AVU (African Virtual University), COL (Commonwealth of Learning) in Angola/DRC & Mozambique, CEMASTEAM (Centre for Mathematics, Science and Technology Education in Africa) , and sub-regional initiatives such as Institutional Cooperation in Higher Education and Training in the SADC regional (UNISA leadership), country to country institutional cooperation for the graduate training of nurses and midwives using five higher education institutions in Kenya and Tanzania with the University of KwaZulu-Natal as leader.

Mr Hoba Pascal, the AAU (Association of African Universities) Representative complemented the message of the AU and NEPAD and reiterated the concern of all African universities regarding the quality of teaching. He further added that while universities need to be competitive, the quality of higher education is to have a 'special status' and not be compromised as a product of 'general commodity'. Cross-border teaching needs to complement existing education mechanisms and not be used as a means to "replace shortages." He made a compelling case for the integration of ICTs at the level of higher education and the need for African universities to set up a consortium to negotiate a bandwidth, which would give Universities internet access at subsidized rates, and improve a much needed communication strategy to strengthen university networks for international cooperation.

Any discussion involving African nations in the context of globalization must, by definition, encompass the African Diaspora as well – which includes the Latin American and Caribbean region. This was a gentle reminder to the group by Professor Hamilton of the University of the West Indies. Over the years the University has signed numerous MoUs (Memoranda of Understanding) with a host of African universities. Although the rate of academic exchange activities remains limited, significant progress has been made through distance education programmes such as: a) the joint research between UWI and the Agricultural Research Council of South Africa investigating selected species of an insect destructive to crops; and b) the numerous university level interventions and education programmes addressing the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

The Africa-Asia University Dialogue presented by Professors Kuroda and Sawamura is an international development cooperation initiative in education and jointly sponsored by UNESCO and Centre for the Study of International Cooperation in Education (CICE) at the Hiroshima University, Japan and a selected number of universities in Africa. The Steering Committee for this initiative includes: African universities, UNESCO, and Hiroshima University (CICE), in consultation with JICA, UNU and participating universities in Asia. In this project the contribution of CICE includes: a) research and development, b) policy analysis and recommendation, c) compilation and dissemination of useful knowledge, and d) support of model project implementation. With these key areas of interest, the Project on Africa-Asia University Dialogue focuses on the role of universities in meeting the collective commitment of EFA which includes: a) cross-border sharing to bridge the knowledge gap for education development, and b) promotion of a self-reliant approach to basic education development in Africa through a strategy of research and reflection, and dialogue and collaboration between universities in Africa and Asia. The expected outcome of this cooperation project is the development of an African university network, which promotes policy research in support of government efforts for basic education development. The ethos of self-reliance aims to inculcate values which include: a) a visionary and proactive approach, b) giving priority to human development, c) allowing ownership of policies and development strategies and processes, d) promoting cross-border cooperation, and e) avoiding donor dependency.

In setting the stage for the working groups, Professor Alexander Boksenberg of the UK National Commission for UNESCO and Cambridge University in the UK pointed out that partnerships like the AAB are often a necessity also for “developed” countries, particularly in areas of science and technology. Citing the autumn 2004 report of the Third World Academy of Sciences (TWAS) Building Scientific Capacity among many others, he stressed the fundamental importance of Science and Technology (S&T) in country development: indeed, alongside general education, the only viable way to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and beyond is through the extensive application of S&T. For the developing countries of Africa to be in a position to exploit what science crucially offers, however, they need a critical mass of S&T capability and actively to sustain this through S&T research capacity in the higher education systems both at the individual and institutional level.

The higher education systems, as well as having responsibility for research and for training new generations that will participate in transforming a country's S&T base, act also as a focus for modernization of society, for evidence-based decision-making on what is technically possible and for mediating between the political and industrial spheres. Furthermore, scientific knowledge as a common heritage of all humankind, as well as the practice of science, knows no borders. Sharing scientific knowledge across its spectrum, and joining in making advances in science, are therefore powerful means of bringing about international cooperation as well as founding critical common development.

But, he said, with the devastating result of continual and massive brain drain it is a severe challenge to nurture and maintain sufficient numbers of highly qualified and innovative scientists and engineers. It is essential, therefore, to create the environment and provide the opportunities and the means that equip them to be effective contributors to a country's goals. Only with the prospect of satisfactory achievement can the necessary people feel the sense of purpose that encourages them to remain. A large part of the solution lies in South-South and North-South cooperation and of commitments for infrastructure and necessary assistance on the ground from the advanced countries. The context of AAB points the way to building sustainable intellectual capacity in Africa, based on establishing working connections between research groups in major educational and research institutions in the North and developing counterparts within the higher education systems in Africa, there to build centres and networks of excellence jointly participating as equal partners in locally strategic science and technology research projects of the world class.

It is important that these African centres are locally determined and owned. An underlying and necessary component is access to information and communication technologies, so enabling global inclusion and equality of participation in S&T as well as facilitating the internal development of science and of science education. He concluded by citing the British Council Higher Education Links scheme funded by the UK Department for International Development, which was a powerful catalyst in joining institutions to facilitate professional and practical skills development as well as enhancing mutual understanding at a pivotal time for the global community.

Presentations of experiences brought to the meeting information, new ideas and opportunities for cooperation. We were reminded of the advantages of partnerships, the challenges and how to overcome them. These presentations were useful inputs to the follow-up discussions of the working groups. Mrs Gordon gave an update on the UNITWIN Programme, what it does and how it does it. We were particularly pleased to hear that efforts were being made to improve its efficiency and effectiveness. Complementary to the UNITWIN presentation was that of ORBICOM made by Mr Giguère who informed us of the network and its achievements and challenges.

The project on New Educational Technology, Beyond Borders, presented jointly by Ms Mukina (Russia) and Mr Johansson (Sweden) showed an impressive use of technology to motivate learning and sustain quality education. A brief visit to St-Petersburg was used as an example of how the new technology can inspire learning.

Participants would have liked a full tour of St Petersburg. TOKTEN presented by Ms Pham, is an obvious partner for AAB as well as the Finland North-South Corporation programme presented by Ms Airas. The Malawi-Scotland project presented by Ms Robertson showed how cross-border partnerships can make a difference to local communities. Professor John Morgan gave an overview of the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission in the United Kingdom, noting its achievements, challenges and some possible solutions.

Already some participants have indicated their interests in having their universities collaborate with these initiatives and have requested UNESCO to enable the linkages.

The Working Groups

Four parallel working groups were set up to permit more interaction among participants. The discussions in the working groups were guided by questions and areas listed for exploration and decision-making. The questions were:

What institutional policies and practices would facilitate inter-university cooperation?

What are the challenges to cross-border cooperation and how to overcome them? - giving special attention to:

- (a) sustainability of inter-university cooperation;
- (b) use of ICT – noting African challenges for the use of internet services.

The working groups were also invited to:

- a) establish linkages for cooperation and start-up activities – identify cooperating institutions and areas and modalities for cooperation;
- b) identify options for financial and technical support;
- c) explore opportunities for involving professors who have distinguished themselves in their respective fields and live in the diaspora.

The outcomes of the working groups are presented in three categories: a) concerns, policies and practices to facilitate inter-university cooperation, b) challenges to inter-university cooperation, and c) areas for specific cooperation between and among universities.

Concerns, policies and practices to facilitate inter-university cooperation

- Cooperation mechanisms should permit mutual sharing and equal recognition of partners;
- Terms and conditions of partnerships should be specified in a memorandum of understanding signed by all parties;

- Financing cooperation should take into consideration cost-sharing possibilities at the institutional level;
- Partnership should promote involvement of universities in development needs of local communities, thus improving the relevance of their programmes;
- Effectiveness of partnerships can be improved if the governing council of universities should bring academics and government together in individual countries in determining areas of priority;
- To foster sustainability, there is need for a paradigm shift from dependence on external support towards internal support and self reliance;
- Universities should identify cost-effective, non-traditional resources that can be tapped for improving higher education quality and outreach, using the services of newly-retired professors;
- There is need for mediating organizations such as UNESCO, African Association of Universities, AU and NEPAD to enable inter-university cooperation. Such linkages and partnerships with universities would lead to more strategic approaches for accessing global resources such as that provided by the G8 for higher education research.

Challenges to inter-university cooperation

- Sustainability
- Language
- Brain drain
- High level of staff turnover - HIV/AIDS being a contributor
- Financing the cooperation, particularly South-South cooperation
- Getting commitments of institutions and governments
- Use of ICTs in Africa is limited by narrow bandwidths due to funding constraints
- Instability in both university and the wider society

Proposals for inter-university cooperation

Some participants indicated the areas for cooperation for their institutions, and these can be followed up immediately. Others thought that they were not yet ready to identify the specific areas. Nevertheless, the latter group identified a range of needs.

Specific areas for cooperation were noted by University of Namibia, University of Botswana, University of the West Indies, University of Nyala in Sudan, University of Nairobi, University of Ghana, University of Dar-es salaam, and University of Ouagadougou. There was a great demand from all institutions to strengthen cooperation to build capacity in ICTs, while improving the quality of higher education would be a cross-cutting theme.

Some common areas for cooperation were identified as follows:

- HIV/AIDS
- ICTs
- Exchange of programmes, professors and students

- Various areas of Science and technology
- Teacher Education
- Research
- Administrative collaboration
- Publications and conferences

To operationalize Academics Across Borders – inter-university cooperation

The group proposed:

- the establishment of associations of retirees in country and within the diaspora;
- that universities be proactive in setting up cooperation initiatives and prepare their own strategic plan for collaboration, setting out content, processes, time frame, and where necessary, a sunset clause. In this way they would be the owners and the driving force to ensure maximum benefits for all partners;
- that UNESCO should seek to cooperate with other similar initiatives and make use of existing databanks in associations and agencies such as TOKTEN, ORBICOM and CIMO;
- that a network of networks be presented to the next meeting of the NGOs, noting also that discussions should include the NGOs in the diaspora;
- improvement of internet capacity through a consortium of universities working together to negotiate internet services;
- that the role of UNESCO should be to facilitate inter-university cooperation in Academics Across Borders through: a) providing a forum for dialogue, b) assisting in mobilizing resources, c) being a think-tank for good practices in inter-university cooperation and d) collaborating with universities to assess the impact of inter-university cooperation.

Concern was expressed for the lack of definition of the term centres of excellence: what are the criteria for determining a centre of excellence? UNESCO indicated that it had a set of criteria that was developed for the UNITWIN Programme, but that this was not an exact science because of the diversity needs. These criteria and others from various sources should be pragmatically explored in order to prepare a framework for identifying centres of excellence in Africa. Whichever path one may take, what is clear is that such centres should provide a critical mass for building and sustaining quality higher education and research in Africa.

In concluding, note should be taken of the following:

- Political and institutional will and commitment expressed by NEPAD to work in partnership for the advancement of new knowledge, skills and values for African States;
- Commitment to international support expressed by UNESCO and Ambassador Craddock of the UK with the hope that other countries will follow suit in advancing AAB;
- AAB should complement and support existing education networks and operational mechanisms for cross-border cooperation;

- International cooperation with Africa should include the African diaspora, and the Africa-Asia Dialogue should facilitate South-South cooperation;
- The following important need was clearly indicated in favour of African universities: ICT implementation programme that includes training, availability of appropriate software and necessary hardware;
- Access to the free use of software in the educational domain and removal of all kinds of duties and taxations with respect to ICT equipment and logistic materials
- Respective Africa Governments should provide all necessary infrastructure and laws to facilitate and accommodate ICT projects as well as provide funds for effective communication networking for international cooperation.

In the closing session chaired by Prof. Georges Haddad and Prof. Tagoe, Rector of the University of Ghana. Professor Tagoe expressed appreciation to UNESCO for the Initiative and pointed out that while there were strengths in African higher education, there were many challenges yet to be met. Georges Haddad underscored the need for important exchange and partnerships in higher education. He proposed to support higher education research in Africa through:

1. An international African Scientific Journal;
2. A research prize for Africa – about six Ph.D students should be selected and given research grants.

He also informed the meeting that teacher education in Africa is a high priority for UNESCO and will be pursued as such in the coming years.

Ambassador Craddock in his remarks commended the idea of Academics Across Borders and strongly recommended that UNESCO should:

1. undertake the role of global coordination of AAB, and as part of this responsibility, undertake a mapping of available opportunities that would fall in the context of AAB or would be partners with AAB;
2. take the steps necessary to ensure that AAB remains relevant to the needs of developing countries.

In closing he stated that the UK would be prepared to support the mapping exercise.

Participants were generally positive towards the proposals and also made suggestions that would help to move AAB forward. On this note the Chairpersons closed the meeting.