In the framework of The UNESCO Teacher Training Initiative in Sub-Saharan Africa

Capacity Building of Lead Teacher Training Institutions in Sub-Saharan Africa

Summary
CAPACITY BUILDING OF LEAD TEACHER TRAINING INSTITUTIONS IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

BACKGROUND

The key elements in the developing of quality teacher education and training in Africa are the lead teacher training institutions: Ecoles Normales (supérieures, d’Instituteurs des écoles primaires, d’Institutrices des Jardins d’Enfants), university-level, Departments of teacher training, and selected professional institutions. These are the best national sources for quality education for the country, being the training ground for future leaders in education and possessing a deep reflection of national culture. Some ten years ago, UNESCO decided to place a special emphasis on the development of these institutions, particularly, normal schools. With changing conditions and the emergence of new challenges, an in-depth evaluation of these institutions were essential. Teacher colleges, originally established 30 or 40 years ago, had fallen into neglect and teacher educational systems in general are unprepared to deal with the demands of EFA, ever badly weakened by economic and security problems, HIV/AIDS, and brain drain. Quality has become a casualty of quantity. Open and distance learning and ICTS could only address a fraction of the problem. At the session of UNESCO's Executive Board, US$ 635,000 was allotted to the Division of Higher Education on the project: "Capacity building of lead teacher-training institutions in sub-Saharan Africa" to evaluate and strengthen the main teacher-training institutions and provide recommendations for strengthening their impact.

The project aimed to develop a holistic assessment of teacher-training institutions in each of the 46 Sub-Saharan countries. A total of 44 assessments were made to determine, among others, the institutions' operations, their capacity, the possible types of assistance required to improve policies and practices and facilitate the adjustment of overall plans. The study likewise sought to promote co-operation between the countries and the institutions concerned. Piloted by UNESCO's Section for Teacher Education, it was carried out in less than one year. Through an integration of evaluations, it was possible to propose an overall vision of the situation in sub-Saharan Africa while highlighting certain national characteristics.

STRATEGY

Forty-four senior-level educationalists responsible for national teacher-training issues in their respective countries were identified as national focal points. Ministries of Education and National Commissions were requested to appoint these focal points to coordinate with the experts (evaluators) who were appointed by UNESCO.

Experts were drawn from the pool of African senior-level educationalists responsible for national and Africa-regional teacher-training issues. Criteria for selection of experts included:

- Experience in issues of the management of teacher-training institutions in Africa: physical plant, planning and finance, accreditation, human resources development, networking among several educational providers, relative strengths and weaknesses of teachers' colleges or freedom/institutional autonomy.
- Sensitivity to the potential for such institutions to build research and development capacities for curriculum innovation, ICT-networking, etc.
- Well-informed on qualifications for entry into the teacher profession, certification, promotion, etc, and on issues such as teacher burnout and dropout.
• Experience in dialogue with Ministerial officials (Education, Planning, Finance), and officials of IGOs and NGOs (e.g., teachers’ associations) who have major stakes in teacher education in the country.
• Experience in pro-active evaluation.

Each mission was for five working days to include in-depth visits to the lead teacher-training institutions identified, and to relevant officials within the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Planning and Finance, teachers’ associations, leading NGOs, IGOs. The focus of the visits to the institutions was pro-active: to engage in close dialogue with the heads of the teacher-training institutions as well as the National Focal Point to make sure that the resulting analysis and recommendations were directly related to implementation of existing national plans and commitments. The teachers’ associations were also given an opportunity to react to the suggestions. Two types of specific recommendations were sought from the reports:

(i) identification of urgently needed short-term improvements of teacher-training institutions which could conceivably be addressed by regular budget funds allocated to the activity.
(ii) extra-budgetary proposals, as needed, to remedy the need/situation identified.

A meeting to discuss the effective implementation of recommendations resulting from the evaluation studies was scheduled in UNESCO Dakar from 11-13 September 2003.

OVERVIEW OF THE ASSESSMENTS

1. Although teacher training was widely proclaimed as a “national priority”, the description of teachers’ situations, their living and working conditions, and their opportunities for personal advancement was largely negative. In many cases, teaching appeared to be merely a job to do while waiting for something better.

2. The widely perceived importance of teacher training was often not being translated into any education policy and to the fundamentals of teacher recruitment nor into subsequent steps for professionalization.

3. Regarding conditions of employment and work, these were largely lamentable. Salaries were inadequate or uncertain, working conditions often substandard.

4. The presence of a recognized and active trade union did not automatically lead to higher pay, or stem the drain of professionals moving away to more lucrative positions. Unions do, however, participate in the permanent re-training of staff and in the dissemination of teaching resources, as well as obtaining various advantages and helping to instil a professional culture.

5. Regarding delivery configurations, diversity is the norm. Thus in some countries, there is widespread recourse to the private sector; some countries have a tendency to develop separate training systems supplying the various school systems (religious, private commercial, public, community); while in others, the state tends to have responsibility for providing training and ensuring its uniformity. The duration of training varies considerably, both within and across countries.

6. Means of communication were inadequate. A major, co-ordinated programme of physical re-equipment and overhauling was badly needed. Although new technology is called for, only a very low proportion of already purchased equipment is actually working. Higher priority needs to be given to maintain it.
7. Regarding documentation and libraries, although almost all the establishments visited have a library, the number of works available is very seldom as high as 10,000, sometimes only running to a few hundreds. The cost of customs duties on the import of books makes library upgrading even harder. The use of libraries operated by means of international cooperation is rare. There is in general a great dearth of publications and of publishing capacity. Few scientific reviews have been launched, though some establishments publish news-sheets.

8. Newly-trained teachers often remain unemployed and when they find employment, it is always not as teachers. Paradoxically, the high level to which prospective teachers are trained can induce them to abandon the profession, or leave it sooner than they otherwise would.

9. The paucity of research capability and output hinders national capacity building in teaching effectiveness, assessment and professional development. Effective establishment of research centres requires review by various ministries on the usefulness and application of research aimed at teacher training institutions. Regional cooperation to strengthen the research capacity of given teacher-training institutions is a potential source of extra benefit that has been too little used.

10. The awarding of much demanded, lengthy scholarships in Northern countries from foreign aid contributes heavily to the brain drain. Although high-level scientific research, including educational research, cannot currently exist without North-South contacts and although mobility of researchers is thus favorably viewed, new practices of co-operation such as the introduction of scholarships in alternation need to be better developed to help stem brain drain.

Reflecting 1-10 above, the content of requests made to UNESCO varied a great deal:

- the general reorganization of teacher recruitment;
- building maintenance;
- plant and equipment;
- help with an establishment’s course preparation;
- the sending of experts;
- training of pre-school teachers;
- computer equipment and its maintenance;
- the permanent re-training of primary teachers;
- a plan for on-site permanent re-training for all establishments;
- support for the setting up of non-university further education;
- the creation of teaching resource centres;
- resource centres for training establishments;
- help with the dissemination of scientific information using the new technologies;
- an international network to disseminate the skills of university teaching;
- a resource centre to support distance training, the upgrading of libraries;
- the creation of research centres and the rehabilitation of laboratories, among other things.

The most frequently repeated requests were for help with planning and making sustainable computer equipment; with the development of libraries; with ongoing re-training; and with the fostering of innovation in teaching, in preparation of curricula, and in acquisition of the national language(s).
THE DAKAR WORK SESSION (11-13 September 2003)

The Dakar Work Session was the locus for strengthening the network among partners in Teacher Education, particularly among policy makers, leaders in government and managers in education. It covered a wide representation ranging from government officials: Ambassadors, Embassy representatives; Executive Board delegates from UNESCO and heads of UNESCO Field Offices; local teacher unions; international organizations: Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie, West African Economic and Monetary Union, African Development Bank, UNICEF, ILO, IICBA.

The task was to fill gaps and correct errors in the assessors' reports, to propose recommendations, and provide short and medium-term viable solutions. The context was how disclosed shortfalls were impeding quality of education, especially with regard to EFA. An Action Agenda was developed to provide direction and to keep the recommendations practical with regard to policy and to subsequent intra-country and intra-regional cooperation.

EMERGING ACTION STRATEGIES FROM THE DAKAR WORK SESSION

1- Setting up effective working networks
   a- “capacity-building” centres (the centres established to prepare the “capacity-building” activities of teacher training establishments in sub-Saharan Africa should be required to continue their networking and information-disseminating activity. Compensation to be established for this.)
   b- UNESCO Chairs in Education
   c- meetings of heads of institutions
   d- meetings of teacher training institution staff

2- Training Teaching staff
   a- courses to bring training staff in teacher-training institutions up to postgraduate diploma level
   b- seminars in regions and/or individual establishments (provide support in the form of materials and equipment, teaching costs and travel)
   c- training in the preparation and editing of training modules (by country groups within regions; organized by UNESCO)

3- Training heads of teacher-training institutions
   a- courses in administrative and financial management (by country groups within regions; organized by UNESCO)
   b- courses in human resources management (by country groups within regions; organized by UNESCO)

4- Other training
   a- training of distance learning mentors
   b- courses in teaching methods for all students

5- Generating new information on the current situation
   a- Systematic listing of establishments and their characteristics in the various countries (a task for the “capacity-building” centres, with the support of Headquarters)
   b- Preparation of a Directory of African Teacher Training Staff (a task for the “capacity-building” centres, with support from managers of establishments)
c- A compendium of the texts governing teacher training in the various countries (a task for the “capacity-building” centres)
d- Survey on the availability of new ICT in teacher-training institutions (a task for the “capacity-building” centres, with support from Headquarters)
e- Setting up a data bank on innovations in the field of teacher training (a task for the networks)
f- Drafting a report on national and international meetings on teacher training in sub-Saharan Africa (initially as a trainee project for young researchers; then to be continued by the networks)

6- Information sharing and dissemination
   a- bring reproduction equipment up to date
   b- establish a basic teacher training library at every institution (funded by UNESCO)
   c- organize the production of news-sheets in every teacher training institution (on-site or not)
   d- support for scientific publishing (purchases for dissemination rather than subsidies to publication?) [An example: the “Cahiers africains de recherche en éducation” - African Papers on Research in Education]
   e- assistance with the setting up of institutional premises
   f- use existing means of distribution [e.g. Bureau and Agency bulletins, etc.]

7- Project assistance
   a- Research into teacher training
   b- Improving/Updating Teacher training programmes
   c- Teacher training manual
   d- Development and dissemination of training modules throughout the region
   e- Creation of teaching materials (in particular: development and dissemination of local techniques and resources for experimentation).

CURRENT ACTIVITIES

This project, initially limited to the Sub-Saharan African states, serves as a model to be expanded this year to the seven Arab State countries of the continent: Mauritania, Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Libya, Sudan and Egypt.

Short-term and medium-term strategies for reorganizing both existing and projected resources to help build up teacher-training institutions are the centrepiece for the Teacher Education's 2004-2005 work plan. A solid policy-rationale for extra-budgetary proposals has been established, of which there are now seven (Angola, Burkina Faso, Togo, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Congo Brazzaville, Democratic Republic of Congo) funded by Japanese Funds-in-Trust. Activity financing contracts/projects for Kenya, Lesotho, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, Democratic Republic of Congo, Seychelles, Togo and Zambia - developed in 2003 to assist teacher-training institutions - are currently being implemented, monitored and subsequently evaluated for their impact in Teacher Education. Other regular budget projects as well as extra-budgetary projects are being designed to realistically respond to continuously emerging changes and needs.