



**Closing Remarks by Peter Okebukola,  
General Rapporteur for Africa**

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**2009 World Conference on Higher Education (WCHE): The new  
dynamics of higher education and research for societal change and  
development**

**(UNESCO, Paris, 5-8 July 2009)**

Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

We had the exciting task of aggregating the summaries of presentations and discussions at 41 plenary, parallel and special sessions. From sunup of the conference of the Opening Ceremony to sundown of this closing session, we strived to capture the major thrusts of interventions of the DG-UNESCO, the eminent persons who graced the Opening Ceremony, Ministers, institutional and individual delegates including students. We embedded into all of these the conclusions of the regional preparatory meetings and the Internet Forum into what has been distilled into the draft Communiqué of the conference and the conference report which will follow.

We found, most strikingly, an infectious dynamism among the over 1,200 participants to propel higher education to orbits that will respond to contemporary and future global challenges, and not restrained by the pervading, unfavourable economic climes. We scanned the meeting rooms, all were full during sessions. The streets and shopping malls of Paris had few if any participants during the sessions. The matter of higher education is serious business and participants commitment to the conference, reflected this seriousness.

The conference agreed on far-reaching recommendations on its three sub-themes of internationalisation, regionalisation and globalisation; equity, access and quality; learning, research and innovation.

Permit me now to summarise the distillates of issues which relate to Africa at this conference.

### **Higher Education in Africa**

The 2009 World Conference gave special focus to the challenges and opportunities for the revitalisation of higher education in Africa. The issues raised for African higher education are integrated throughout the Communiqué.

Participants welcomed the recommendations of the Dakar Regional Preparatory Conference of November 2008, and noted the progress recorded since the 1998 World Conference on Higher Education especially increased enrolments in higher education. Participants underscored the critical need to confront emerging challenges relating to gender and racial inequality, academic freedom, brain drain and the lack of preparedness of the graduates for the labour market. They underlined the urgency for the adoption of new dynamics in African higher education towards the comprehensive transformation to sharply enhance its relevance and responsiveness to the political, social and economic realities of African countries. This new momentum can provide a trajectory in the fight against under-development and poverty in Africa. This will demand greater attention to higher education and research in Africa than has been the case for the last eleven years. Higher education in Africa should foster good governance based on robust accountability and sound financial principles.

1. The evolution of a quality African higher education and research area, will be stimulated through institutional, national, regional and international collaboration in teaching, learning and research. There is, therefore the need for a strategic orientation towards the establishment/strengthening of such collaboration. African countries with well-developed higher education systems should share with those with less-developed systems. We must commit to making African higher education an instrument for regional integration.

2. The development of the higher education area in Africa will also be catalysed by the establishment of a quality assurance mechanism at the regional level. In this connection, we urge the fast-tracking of the initiative of AAU, with support from UNESCO towards stimulating the setting up of national, sub-regional and regional quality assurance systems. Equally, staff and student mobility within an African higher education area will be fostered through the active implementation of the Arusha Convention on mutual recognition of diplomas, certificates and degrees. The indispensability of the Pan African University in fostering African integration should be stressed.

3. Access: To meet the rapidly increasing demand for higher education and research in Africa, there is an urgent need for differentiated institutions, ranging from research universities to polytechnics and technical colleges, as well as diversified programmes within each institution, to cater to different types of learners as well as the needs of the country. The increasing demand for higher education will hardly be met by traditional face-to-face delivery alone. Other approaches such as open and distance and online learning, will have to be resorted to, especially for areas such as continuous adult education and teacher training.

4. Curriculum relevance: A number of areas of expertise are crucial for the diversification of African economies, yet are not receiving required attention. These include agriculture, natural resource extraction, the environment, indigenous knowledge systems, and energy. A focus on these areas in higher education can contribute to ensuring the competitiveness of African economies.

5. Funding: Education remains a public good, but private financing should be encouraged. While every effort must be made to increase public funding of higher education, it must be recognised that public funds are limited and may not be able to fully cater for the rapidly developing sector. Other formulae and sources of funding especially drawing on the public-private partnership model should be found.

6. Students should be given a voice in governance of higher education at all levels.

7. Participants expressed deep appreciation for the ongoing support to the development of African higher education by several countries and organizations. They also welcomed the new pledges made by several new partners, notably the Republic of Korea, China, and India. They also applauded the concrete proposals from the African Development Bank, the African Union and association of universities notably AAU, AUF and ACU on the issue of governance and higher education delivery models.

8. The participants appreciated the priority accorded Africa at this conference by UNESCO.

Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, we now have key elements of a roadmap for taking higher education to desired shores. Since tomorrow is not for us to see, we trust that adaptability to unforeseen circumstances will be a key ingredient as we apply this roadmap at the national, sub-regional and regional levels.

Thank you for your attention.

Peter Okebukola