

The fourth debate of 2016 focused on improving the quality of primary and secondary education in West Africa. WATHI 5 proposes five recommendations to guide the collective action of decision-makers and citizens in order to improve the quality of primary and secondary education in the countries of the region.

AVENUES FOR ACTION

- 1** Include national educational projects as a strategic priority for long-term economic, social and cultural transformation plans in all countries; creating in each country an independent Higher Authority for Education, laid out in the Constitution and tasked with defining the main orientations of the education and training systems and conducting annual public debates on the state of the education system; ensuring that all the reforms proposed in the field of education by the international partners are consistent with the national choices before any implementation begins; implementing national policies for the promotion of reading as well as general knowledge and information technologies.
- 2** Establish school calendars and programs adapted to local economic and social contexts, particularly in rural areas; taking into account agricultural seasons and general economic and social constraints to determine the school calendar; involving local populations in the development of school curricula through formal annual processes of information, consultation and debate at regional, departmental or community level.
- 3** Make teacher training, mentoring and effective supervision the priority area in educational reforms; setting up emergency programs to build the capacities of teachers who were hastily recruited through intensive training during the school holidays; strengthening the staffing, training and operational capacities of national education inspectors, supervisory bodies and of all public and private school supervision; resolutely fighting teachers' absenteeism.
- 4** Implement in a controlled and gradual way a profound revision of the curricula with a focus, during the first ten years of primary and secondary school, on the learning and knowledge that corresponds to the most fundamental requirements for the integration of children in their economic, social and cultural environment; giving particular priority to reading and writing, to the initiation of sciences through activities using local materials, to civic and moral education and to the discovery of the diversity of cultures, beliefs and religions.
- 5** Pragmatically consider all options to address the extraordinary challenge of providing quality public education to all children in the contexts of high population growth as well as limited human and financial resources, this being guided by four objectives: a basic education focused on basic learning essentials for a harmonious and productive life in society for nearly all children up to the age of 16; the provision of a high-quality education at the secondary level in preparation of higher education for a realistic percentage of the population of children selected through prior learning assessment tests; a significant increase of the ratio of students in technical and vocational schools; the maintenance of a framework of permanent dialogue on education in order to prevent recurrent strikes which have disastrous consequences for the countries of the region.

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

How to move from recommendations to action:

- ✔ The development of a strategy for implementing the recommended actions is as important as the formulation of such actions. In all African countries, general states or national forums on education take place regularly. They lead to the clear identification of the most important weaknesses in education systems and the formulation of promising recommendations.
- ✔ But we generally see that it is very difficult to translate the recommendations into concrete reforms and observable changes. The years go by with the same strikes, sometimes very long in education, the same discouraging evaluations of the level of pupils in essential fields like reading and writing and the same sense of resignation when facing the challenge of the number of children who need to be enrolled in comparison with the slow growth of human and financial resources.
- ✔ The main message of this Mataka is that the issue of public education is too important for the present and future of each of the countries in the region to be left to governments, parliamentarians and education actors alone. It is all social categories and all citizens who have an interest in ensuring that national educational systems constantly improve their performance in relation to the objectives defined by each country in a sovereign manner. The exponential development of the provision of private education cannot be considered as the only possible response to the degradation of public systems.
- ✔ Meeting the challenge of quantity but also of quality implies that the countries of the region must refocus on their true needs in relation to the future they want for their children and, when necessary, distance themselves from international objectives and standards that do not take into account each country's specific historical paths, their capacity to generate their own resources and their visions for the future.
- ✔ The basic choices to be made in the field of education should, as much as possible, be the subject of national consensus which shields them from short-sighted electoral decisions. It is for this reason that the creation of a credible institution, independent of the political and corporatist contingencies, as described in the first course of action, is indispensable.
- ✔ The only way to create the conditions for the implementation of reforms is to share precise information on the various dimensions of the educational challenge with citizens and to create high quality public debates that allow for effective action and the permanent correction of observed dysfunctions.

- ✓ The creation of a broad coalition of organizations and citizens committed to education issues at the country level and the establishment of a network at the regional level (surpassing language barriers) for the exchange of information, lessons and experiences from different countries. · Such networks already exist, but they generally include education experts who are not vocal in public debates that are accessible to citizens and are too involved with governments and / or international organizations to take strong public positions on such issues such as teacher absenteeism, inspections failures, unfulfilled government promises or the resignation of parents.
- ✓ The stakes are now too important to continue not to mobilize the collective intelligence and creativity of experts and non-expert citizens to overcome the most serious obstacles to the transmission of knowledge, know-how and social skills to a majority of children of all social classes in West Africa and beyond.

The issue of the quality of primary and secondary education in West Africa is a major challenge for the future. It is necessary to mobilize all stakeholders and citizens of each of the countries of the region on this crucial issue. WATHI chose this topic for its debate to provoke an open and deep reflection on the most important structural issues the West African region is facing. The views, analyses, avenues for action highlighted do not put an end to the debate. Their objective is to install it in the citizen public space.

You can send your comments, reactions, recommendations to refine the proposals and the means to implement them to the following address: ledebat@wathi.org

WATHI

WATHI, the West Africa citizen think tank, is a participative and multidisciplinary think tank which aims to contribute to the sharing of knowledge and the production of ideas on the crucial political, economic, social and cultural issues for the present and the future of the countries of West Africa.

The geographical area of WATHI includes 15 countries of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) as well as Cameroon, Chad and Mauritania. Freely inspired by «waati», which means «time» in Bamanankan language of Mali, WATHI expresses both the urgency of a collective mobilization and the need for long-term commitment.



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