

## Promoting skills development and education research in Africa

Editorial by Kathryn Toure, ERNWACA Regional Coordinator

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on Critical Perspectives on Gender, Education, and Skills in West and Central Africa at Basic and Post-Basic Levels

This introductory editorial reviews outcomes of the ERNWACA<sup>1</sup> and NORRAG<sup>2</sup> 2004 Critical Perspectives regional seminar on education in West and Central Africa. It then alludes to challenges education researchers face in Africa, referring to the case of the 2004 World Bank study on skills development in Africa<sup>3</sup>.

### Schooling and Skills Development in West and Central Africa

Formal schooling. Skills development. In Africa, do these worlds meet? Under what circumstances? Do they respond to national and regional development needs in West and Central Africa? With gender as a lens, what can we learn about schooling? about skills development? How critical will African researchers be of international documents on education and training?

ERNWACA and NORRAG decided to address these questions at a **Critical Perspectives** regional seminar on schooling, gender and skills development, organized in Bamako, Mali in September 2004 with 50 researchers, practitioners, and policymakers. The seminar was the second in Africa, following up on one in East Africa (see NORRAG News No. 32 from August 2003). Other partners included the Malian ministries of Education and of Labour and professional development, National Museum of Mali, Tamaro Kene theatrical troupe from Mali, Ecobank, SDC<sup>4</sup>, and ADEA.<sup>5</sup>

In NORRAG News No. 35 you will find condensed versions of some of the 2004 Critical Perspectives seminar papers. The **FAWE**<sup>6</sup> paper, which reviews **UNESCO's Global Monitoring Report 2003/2004**,<sup>7</sup> reminds us that though there was a 38% increase in access to formal schooling in Africa during the 1990s, 57% of all out-of-school children are girls. Data on quality, retention, performance and quality of teaching and

**ERNWACA** was founded in Freetown (Sierra Leone) in 1989 by African researchers who wanted, collectively, to offer their expertise for educational and economic development. The bilingual network now has 250 members in 13 West and Central African countries and works with African universities, government ministries, civil society and international partners. With over 15 years of experience in collaborative transnational research and regional networking, Ernwaca seeks to build national and regional research capacity, conduct research for decision making, stimulate policy and public dialogue through proactive communication and advocacy, and build quality partnerships to improve the conditions for research and peer-reviewed publication. See [www.rocare.org](http://www.rocare.org).

<sup>1</sup> Educational Research Network for West and Central Africa

<sup>2</sup> Network for Policy Research Review and Advice on Education and Training

<sup>3</sup> Johanson, Richard K. ; Arvil V. Adams. 2004. Skills Development in Sub-Saharan Africa, World Bank, Washington, DC, USA, [www.worldbank/labormarkets](http://www.worldbank/labormarkets) for country case studies.

<sup>4</sup> Swiss Development Cooperation

<sup>5</sup> Association for the Development of Education in Africa

<sup>6</sup> Forum for African Women Educators

<sup>7</sup> Available at [www.efareport.unesco.org](http://www.efareport.unesco.org)

learning is unavailable in the Unesco report. In several West and Central African countries, advances were made in girls' education due to universal primary education plans, scholarships or fee elimination for girls, use of media advocacy and special Unicef programs for child-friendly schools. The paper from Togo describes efforts to reduce a more than 20-point gap between the percentage of boys and girls enrolled in school, including community consciousness-raising and support for revenue-generating activities.

The **UEMOA**<sup>8</sup> paper reviews the labour market situation and government responses in its eight (francophone) member countries. Salaried employment is stagnant, yet governments remained focused on training for the formal sector. Papers from Mali present specific small-scale government and NGO initiatives to teach reading, writing and arithmetic to child apprentices; use Centers for Education and Development (CED) to reach out-of-school youth; teach crafts and trades, such as weaving, sewing, metal and wood working to youth, including training in HIV/AIDS prevention and in marketing to adapt business activities to socio-economic environments. The Ghana paper explains why efforts to integrate vocational and technical training into formal education failed: difficulty of teaching skills development to the dictates of academic examinations; costs and responsibilities associated with technical and vocational training; lack of student attraction to such courses. The Gambia paper reiterates the perceived inferiority of work-based learning and insists this must be addressed if education and training is to help stimulate national economic growth and production.

Overall, the papers recommend the following actions:

- Sensitize all actors to the value of both academic and vocational training;
- Increase investment in TEVT<sup>9</sup> and diversify funding for skills development, including employer and trainee contributions;
- Adapt training to learner and socio-economic needs;
- Adapt education and training programmes and formal and non-formal curriculum to reflect needs of the world of work, avoiding gender stereotyping;
- Promote fora for exchange among actors involved in training for the informal sector of the economy;
- Within the context of PRSPs<sup>10</sup>, scale up successful TEVT pilots from reforms of the 1990s;
- Link formal education, non formal education and community development;
- Address gender gaps to achieve quality education for all.

**NORRAG** seeks to improve interactions among research, policy, and practice as a means of supporting education and training. With several hundred members based in universities, research centers, development agencies and NGOs – primarily in Europe but diversifying – NORRAG has been bringing critical perspectives to development aid for over several decades. NORRAG collects, analyses and synthesizes research on education policy and strategy; conducts applied collaborative research; provides advisory services to governments, NGOs and other organizations; engaging in joint advocacy efforts; and strengthens other networks. See [www.norrag.org](http://www.norrag.org).

Lessons learned in organizing the seminar? African researchers were not able to develop critical perspectives, prior to the seminar, on the international documents selected for review – because the documents were available only in Paris and Washington, DC and were too long for online access and/or printing.

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<sup>8</sup> West African Economic and Monetary Union

<sup>9</sup> Technical Education and Vocational Training

<sup>10</sup> Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper

Perspectives? For ERNWACA, continued reflection and research to help educational systems understand market needs and adapt programs accordingly, which will require collaboration with economists. And continued collaboration with NORRAG to improve the conditions for education research. Ernwaca also hopes to continue organizing Critical Perspective regional seminars on education.

### Partnering to improve the conditions for education research in Africa

The preface to the World Bank report on its study on skills development in Africa refers to weak institutional capacity in Africa, which prevented regular monitoring and evaluation of TEVT – and thus necessitated 70 case studies in 20 countries. And the report strongly advocates for increased skills development in Africa.

At ERNWACA, we believe research projects in Africa should help build research and institutional capacity. Ernwaca's regional coordination developed a working tool<sup>11</sup> to analyse partnerships and determine how to develop them so they contribute to improved conditions for education research in Africa. It could be helpful and insightful to evaluate the partnerships and *process* for conducting the World Bank study on skills development and disseminating its findings. We could thus draw lessons for similar work in the future. We do not have in the study report, however, all the elements for such an analysis.

Nonetheless, may we propose a certain number of questions that should be considered?

What was the process for conceptualizing the study? How many meetings were there? Who organized them? Where were they held? Who participated (men/women, which institutions)?

Who learned what from participating in the study? How many women were involved and at what levels? Which institutions benefited? Who received what kind of training in order to conduct the study (men/women)? How pertinent did those persons find that training for future work in their professions?

Where was the analysis conducted? By whom? What were the mechanisms for validating and sharing results? How are African countries using the findings to influence policy and programs?

Where is the data that was collected stored and who has access? How many African researchers published scientific articles using data from the study?

How much did the study cost? Where was the budget spent? Which institutions benefited?

Leaving you with questions, not answers, do enjoy reading NORRAG News No. 35. And let us know your reactions by emailing [info@rocare.org](mailto:info@rocare.org).

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<sup>11</sup> The working tool is available on the next page. Comments to improve the tool may be sent to [info@rocare.org](mailto:info@rocare.org).

## EVALUATING QUALITY OF PARTNERSHIPS for international research -- tool in development

PARTNER / DESIRED QUALITY	P-01	P-02	P-03	P-04	P-05	P-06	P-07	TOTAL over 35 possible	% of total possible
1 <b>honesty and transparency</b> (trust is a 2-way process)	5	5	4	5	4	4	2	29	83%
2 <b>% of budget spent by different partners stated</b>	4	4	4	5	5	3	4	29	83%
3 <b>joint decision-making</b>	5	3	5	5	3	4	3	28	80%
4 <b>procedures help rather than hinder</b>	5	5	4	3	4	4	2	27	77%
5 <b>connections to other partners</b>	5	5	3	3	4	2	3	25	71%
6 <b>collaboration strengthens institution</b>	5	5	4	3	3	2	3	25	71%
7 <b>open &amp; regular communication, active &amp; responsive listening</b>	3	4	5	3	3	2	3	23	66%
8 <b>good technical support/advice</b>	4	4	4	3	2	3	3	23	66%
9 <b>balance between PROCESS and PRODUCT</b>	4	4	4	3	3	3	2	23	66%
10 <b>work leads to quality publications</b>	3	5	4	3	3	2	3	23	66%
11 <b>joint accountability</b>	4	4	4	4	2	3	2	23	66%
12 <b>mutual learning, win/win situation</b>	4	3	4	3	2	3	3	22	63%
13 <b>research data remains and is analyzed on the continent</b>	3	3	2	3	5	2	4	22	63%
14 <b>budgets appropriate and timely</b>	4	4	3	3	3	3	2	22	63%
15 <b>member country/regional needs come first, activities pertinent</b>	5	3	3	4	3	2	2	22	63%
16 <b>collaborative formative evaluation, continuous improvement</b>	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	21	60%
17 <b>medium to long term and strategic planning</b>	5	3	4	2	2	2	2	20	57%
18 <b>stated partnership policy</b>	4	2	2	3	2	2	2	17	49%
<b>TOTAL RATING over 90 possible per partner (630 overall)</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>424</b>	
<b>Average of ratings per quality (5=highest possible)</b>	<b>4,2</b>	<b>3,8</b>	<b>3,7</b>	<b>3,4</b>	<b>3,1</b>	<b>2,7</b>	<b>2,7</b>		
% of total possible	83%	77%	73%	68%	62%	54%	53%	<b>67%</b>	

ERNWACA partners were rated well on these qualities.

ERNWACA needs to improve partner relations in these areas.

ERNWACA/ROCARE, Bamako, 2004

The following partners -- with whom ERNWACA had a signed contract and a minimum collaboration period of 12 months during 2002-2004 -- are included in the analysis: ADEA, IDRC, IIEP, NORRAG, SARA/AED, UQAM, University of Montreal (UofM contract was with IDRC) (in alphabetical order).

The collaboration with SDC had not yet lasted 12 months. The SchoolNet contract was for a one-time consultation.

Note that all ERNWACA partners received a rating of above 50%.

Note that having interlocutors in the region seemed to make a difference in the quality of the partnership.