

# Remarks at Global Business Coalition for Education event

Akinwumi A. Adesina  
President  
African Development Bank Group

Washington, DC  
April 14, 2016

## INTRODUCTION

**Dear Sarah Brown, Executive Chair, Global Business Coalition for Education.**

**Dear Heads of delegations, Development Agencies, Business Leaders and Foundation Representatives; Distinguished Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen. All protocols observed.**

I wish to thank Sarah Brown particularly for her invitation and her remarkable commitment to engage the business community in the equity and education agenda through strong, coordinated partnerships with the public sector and foundation actors.

It is a great honor for me to be here this morning, in front of a distinguished audience that is committed to actions, to discuss the situation and challenges of education, as well as ways to change the situation for the better.

## OVERVIEW OF THE SITUATION

***“The foundation of every state is the education of its youth (Diogenes)”***

There are nearly 696 million children and youth in Africa, representing 60% of its total population. These millions could ignite a new age of inclusive growth and prosperity on the continent – if carefully cultivated through education.

Statistics show that 757 million adults are illiterate in the world, of which 30 percent are in Africa. For those, we have missed out on their incredible talent and potentiality.

But more worryingly, according to UNESCO, **more than 124 million children and youth around the world are out of school**; of which 57 million are in Africa.<sup>[1]</sup> Something can still be done for those young people, but the clock is ticking.

And, if the situation does not change, a significant fraction of the future generations will be in the same situation due to intergenerational transmission of poverty. And this is not a legacy we want to leave behind.

## WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES?

Before discussing the challenges, one thing needs to be acknowledged: significant progress has been made in expanding education opportunities, including in Africa, over the past 15 years.

---

<sup>[1]</sup> **“Today, more than 124 million children and youth around the world are out of school and at least 250 million children are not learning basic skills.** Of these, 59 million children remain out of primary school and 65 million teenagers are not attending secondary school, missing out on vital basic skills needed for future employment.” <http://gbc-education.org/mission/>

For example, the number of out of school children of primary school age decreased by 26 percent. The gross enrollment rate at secondary and higher education has increased by 41 percent and 51 percent respectively. But a lot remains to be done.

Educational infrastructure and “inputs” are insufficient. In Africa, there are 38 primary school children per classroom against 24 globally. Seven out of ten African countries face an acute shortage of teachers, according to a UNESCO report.<sup>[2]</sup>

In addition to poor infrastructure, poor learning outcomes are jeopardizing the future of many children and youth. Today, up to 1/3 of African children completing primary school do not remain literate in their adulthood.

Education systems also need upgrading in order to provide youth with the skills they need to find work, create jobs, and contribute to private sector competitiveness and sustainable economic growth.

Education systems need better governance to promote effective delivery of education services through proper standards, incentives, and accountability mechanisms; in order to maximize returns on investments in education.

Despite progress in gender parity at basic education, much remains to be done to ensure that girls are enrolled in school, and that they reach the highest levels. Females represent only 46% of students in higher education, against 48% at primary education. We want to “educate generations, not single individuals”.<sup>[3]</sup>

## WHAT CAN/SHOULD WE DO?

***“Whatever the cost of our libraries, the price is cheap compared to that of an ignorant nation.”*** [Walter Cronkite](#)

Education is one of the AfDB’s High 5 strategic priorities, related to “improve quality of life for the African people”. It is also a key vehicle to achieve the other four strategic AfDB priorities: “Feed Africa”; “Light and Power Africa”; “Industrialize Africa” and “Integrate Africa”.

We need such an encompassing approach. Building capacities for better governance and additional educational infrastructure is necessary. But education infrastructure is not disconnected from living conditions; including good nutrition and health, decent housing with light at night, or protection from child labor.

Over the period 2005-2015, the Bank approved 56 education projects amounting to US \$1.6 billion.

---

<sup>[2]</sup> <http://www.uis.unesco.org/Education/Documents/fs33-2015-teachers.pdf>

<sup>[3]</sup> Reference to “You educate a man; you educate a man. You educate a woman; you educate a generation.”

— [Brigham Young](#)

We, at the African Development Bank, believe that more can be done, across all types of education, and especially post-primary levels –TVET and Higher education.

We cannot do it alone, nor do we want to. We strongly believe that partnering with the Private sector and other development partners is key to address major bottlenecks in the area of education and youth employment.

At the international level, the Bank has been involved in policy dialogue around the status and future of global education; including participation in the World Education Forum (South Korea, May 2015); or the Oslo Summit on Education for Development (Norway, July 2015).

At the national level, we are supporting Public Private Partnerships in education and skills development, through building with industry and business incubators, or with private universities in countries such as Cape Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Morocco, Rwanda, Tunisia or Zambia.

The Bank is preparing a bold initiative aiming to mobilize financial resources to address unemployment and underemployment among Africa's youth; a critical bottleneck to sustainable economic growth. Through the "Jobs for Youth in Africa Initiative", we intend to invest \$5 billion over the next ten years and create 25 million new jobs. These investments are expected to create opportunities for 50 million young people through skills development, and job creation in Agriculture, Industry and ICT. We also estimate that the Jobs for Youth Initiative will generate over \$30 billion in income gains for Africa in the next ten years.

### **Concluding remarks**

We believe in strong partnerships and our efforts always involve all stakeholders – Governments, Donors, Businesses, Foundations and Civil society; in order to ensure stronger investments and achieve greater results. We are therefore looking forward to working closely with each one of you in financing quality, relevant and inclusive education in Africa.

As [Walter Cronkite](#) said "Whatever the cost of our libraries, the price is cheap compared to that of an ignorant nation." Together we can transform quality of life in Africa and the world – through better and inclusive education! Thank you very much for your kind attention.