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Second ECA/AAU Conference of Vice-Chancellors,
Presidents and Rectors of Institutions of
Higher Learning in Africa

Swaziland (Mbabane), 18-22 February 1985

AIDE-MEMOIRE

- Theme: The Response of Institutions of Higher Learning to Africa's Rapidly Deteriorating Social and Economic Conditions
- Venue and Date: Conference Centre, Royal Swazi Sun, Ezulwini near Mbabane, Swaziland, 18-22 February 1985
- Organized by: United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, the Association of African Universities and the University of Swaziland
(In collaboration with the Organization of African Unity and UNESCO)

I. Introduction

The First ECA/AAU Conference of Vice-Chancellors, Presidents and Rectors of Institutions of Higher Learning in Africa was held in January, 1982 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. That Conference addressed itself to the issue of the contribution of the institutions of higher learning in Africa to the implementation of the Lagos Plan of Action and subsequently adopted a number of recommendations thereon.

The Conference also recommended, among other things, that the institutions of higher learning in Africa should meet periodically, at least once every three years, to review Africa's development problems and examine the role of the institutions of higher learning in solving those problems.

In fulfillment of that mandate and in view of the seriousness of the prevailing economic and social crisis in Africa, the Second Conference has been devoted to the theme: "The Response of Institutions of Higher Learning to Africa's Rapidly Deteriorating Social and Economic Conditions".

II. Objectives

Africa to-day faces a critical economic and social crisis which poses a real threat to the very survival of the continent as a viable economic and social entity. Although the crisis has existed since the mid-1970s, as a result of the cumulative impact of a number of adverse factors both internal and external, it has, however, rapidly escalated and reached a crisis level in the early 1980s as a result of the rapidly deteriorating international economic environment and the widespread, severe and persistent drought which has now spread to 36 African countries.

Those factors have interacted to create a crisis of development in Africa, of unprecedented proportions, and to bring about the worst human and economic disaster in the recent history of Africa. Almost every indicator of social and economic well-being has shown a disturbingly negative picture and/or a downward trend. Suffice here to mention that average per capita income in many African countries is, in real terms, less than what it was 15 years ago; about 70 per cent of the total African population is now destitute or is on the verge of poverty; the terms of trade of African countries declined by more than 50 per cent between 1977 and 1981; the debt situation of African countries has reached a crisis level where as a proportion of the value of exports and services, Africa's external debt is estimated at 180 per cent in 1983 as compared to 130 per cent by the end of 1981 and the ratio of debt service to export earnings amounted to 22.4 per cent in 1983 compared with 10.7 per cent in 1980; about one half of the African labour force is unemployed or underemployed; as a result of the serious collapse in commodity prices, Africa suffered huge losses in foreign exchange earnings to the extent that losses in only six commodities amounted to \$2.2 billion during the period 1979-1981; only one in four Africans has access to safe drinking water; health facilities are grossly inadequate and are unevenly distributed in favour of urban

areas; large scale rural-urban migration and movements of refugees and displaced persons to the urban centres have created intolerable living conditions in urban areas, where it is estimated that between 50 to 60 per cent of the urban population in Africa is currently living in slum and squatter settlements; and despite the fact that impressive quantitative gains have been made in the field of education during the past two decades, education has continued to pose serious difficulties to African governments and has generally failed to appropriately respond to Africa's developmental needs and aspirations.

Furthermore, the abnormally severe, persistent and widespread drought has led to a serious food scarcity, which has further exacerbated an already unfavourable food situation. In 34 drought affected countries the imports of cereals have increased from about 4 million metric tons in 1970 to over 23 million metric tons in 1982. 24 of these countries are not only unable to produce enough food for their rapidly growing populations, but they also don't have sufficient resources to pay for food imports, and have therefore, to depend, to a large extent, on emergency food aid. Furthermore, the drought has triggered off shocking losses in human lives, critical famine, malnutrition, sharp depletion of livestock, water shortages, energy shortages and severe dislocations of the normal life and patterns and has exacerbated the destabilization of the fragile African economies. Particularly painful is the tragic fact that as many as 35 million people are hanging at the very edge of survival to-day in Africa and are in desperate need of help. Tens of thousands of people are currently dying from hunger in Ethiopia and other parts of Africa and thousands more are expected to face the same ominous fate unless urgent relief is forthcoming. In all, 150 million people are to-day on the verge of hunger in Africa.

Shocking as these conditions are, a study recently published by ECA, entitled "ECA and Africa's Development 1963-2008: A preliminary perspective study", has shown that a continuation of the current historical trends - without major/structural conscious changes in the patterns of production, distribution and lifestyles - will only lead by the beginning of the next century to a "nightmare" of total economic collapse, social injustice, human misery and political instability and chaos.

To effectively deal with the current crisis and prevent its recurrence, avoid the undesirable consequences of the "historical scenario" outlined above, and create a "willed future" of hope, prosperity and human dignity in Africa will require that concerted and interdependent action should be undertaken by all concerned in the immediate, short-, medium- and long-runs at the national, sub-regional, regional and international levels.

Such a concerted strategy will dictate that while immediate and short-term action is being taken to alleviate the human suffering and the conditions which gave rise to the short-term crisis, the long-term structural measures that are required for the transformation of Africa from its present dependent situation to a fully self-sustained and self-reliant economic community, as amply elaborated in

the Lagos Plan of Action, must be faithfully implemented. Indeed the potential and the resources, both physical and human, are there and what is needed is the total political commitment and resolve to initiate the necessary structural changes.

While such a responsibility primarily lies with African governments, the institutions of higher learning have a major responsibility for contributing to the creation of the conditions that are necessary for such change and meeting the challenge of the socio-economic crisis in general. The present conference provides the institutions with a unique opportunity to examine their response to the crisis and to detail the actions that need to be undertaken by them.

In light of the foregoing, the Conference is expected to:

- (i) review the causes nature and implications of Africa's socio-economic crisis;
- (ii) examine the measures that are needed to deal with the crisis in the short, medium- and long-terms; and
- (iii) define the response of African institutions of higher learning to the rapidly deteriorating socio-economic conditions in the continent and to the need for establishing a sound basis for Africa's socio-economic recovery and self-reliant and self-sustained development.

In this latter regard it is essential that the Conference should, inter alia,

- (i) re-examine the role of the institutions of higher learning with a view to reorienting and/or strengthening the existing institutional structures, curricula content and methods and the research focus in those institutions to better meet the challenge of the crisis and the requirements for Africa's long-term self-sustained and self-reliant development as enunciated by the Lagos Plan of Action;
- (ii) review and formulate practical measures and strategies for the development of national and regional capacities and capabilities for producing the high quality manpower that is required for Africa's accelerated, self-sustained and self-reliant development;
- (iii) elaborate strategies for the active and effective involvement of the African institutions of higher learning in the process of socio-economic development and the maximization of the contribution of those institutions to that process; and
- (iv) develop guidelines for the further strengthening of co-operation among institutions of higher learning in Africa with a view to better responding to the challenge of socio-economic development in Africa.

Aside from the issue of the crisis, the Conference is also expected to review progress being made in the implementation of the recommendations of the First ECA/AAU Conference and to discuss various aspects related to the cooperation between the institutions of higher learning in general.

III. Participation

Delegates to the Conference will be Vice-Chancellors, Presidents, Rectors, Directors and Principals of institutions of higher learning in Africa. In addition, participation is welcome from other senior academicians and officials nominated by those institutions on the basis of their:

- (i) role in furthering the development of their institutions;
- (ii) knowledge of and involvement in the problems of socio-economic development and higher education; and
- (iii) contribution to human resources development in Africa.

In this regard, university registrars, deans of faculties, professors and distinguished African scholars may be nominated by institutions to participate in the Conference. It is expected that each institution will endeavour to be represented by a delegation of at least two members, and institutions are free to send more than two delegates.

Nominations should be communicated to ECA by telex as soon as possible. All the travel and subsistence expenses of the delegates are to be borne by the nominating institutions.

IV. Agenda for the Meeting

The provisional agenda for the Conference is contained in Annex I of this Aide-memoire.

V. Documentation

Lead papers, covering various topics of the agenda, will be presented for discussion in the plenary and committee sessions of the Conference. The lead papers will be produced both in English and French and every effort will be made to send them to the participating institutions and organizations before the Conference. Institutional papers to appraise other delegates of research and educational activities in respective countries will be submitted in one language only, that of the original document.

VI. Venue and Date

The Conference will be held at the Conference Centre, Royal Swazi Sun, Mbabane, Swaziland from 13-22 February 1985. Participants are expected to arrive in Swaziland on or before 17 February 1985. Information on travel and accommodation are contained in an attached separate document.

VII. Working Languages

English and French will be the working languages of the Conference. Simultaneous interpretation in the two languages will be provided. Translation will be strictly limited to the report and proceedings of the Conference and not to individual papers and reports which are intended for information purposes.

VIII. Agencies and Organizations

In addition to delegates from institutions of higher learning in Africa, invitations will be extended to the United Nations agencies, international organizations and other inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations to attend the Conference as observers.

IX. Programme of Work

The Conference will meet in Plenary and Committee Sessions. A detailed provisional programme of work will be presented for adoption by the Conference.

X. Address for Communication

Enquiries about the Conference and nominations of participants should be addressed to:

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PROVISIONAL AGENDA

1. Opening of the Conference:

Opening statements will be delivered by the representative of the Host Government, the Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa, the Secretary-General of the Association of African Universities and the representatives of the Organization of African Unity and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.
2. Election of Officers:

A Chairman, two Vice-Chairman and a Rapporteur.
3. Adoption of the Agenda and Programme of Work.
4. Consideration of the progress report on the implementation of the recommendations of the First ECA/AAU Conference of Vice-Chancellors, Presidents and Rectors of the Institutions of Higher Learning in Africa.
5. Review of the causes, nature and implications of Africa's socio-economic crisis.
6. Measures to deal with the crisis in the short-, medium- and long-terms.
7. The response of African institutions of higher learning to the challenge of the crisis:
 - (a) Re-orientation and/or strengthening of the institutional structures, curricula content and methods and research focus in the institutions of higher learning to better meet the challenge of the crisis and the requirements for Africa's long-term self-sustaining and self-reliance development;
 - (b) The contribution of the African institutions of higher learning to the development of the high quality manpower that is required for Africa's accelerated and self-sustained socio-economic development;

- (c) Strategies for a more effective and active involvement of the institutions of higher learning in the process of socio-economic development;
 - (d) Guidelines for the strengthening of co-operation among the institutions of higher learning with a view to better responding to the challenge of socio-economic development in Africa.
8. Presentation of the reports of the Committees.
 9. Co-operation between the institutions of higher learning.
 10. Any other business.
 11. Date and venue of the Third Conference.
 12. Adoption of the report of the Second Conference.
 13. Closure of the meeting.