

SYNTHESIS OF THE SYMPOSIUM REPORT

On the theme :

"Higher education and employability of young people : innovative strategies in the framework of sustainable development objectives".

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The Institut Afrique Monde, in partnership with the telephone operator MTN, the Centre for Research and Action for Peace (CERAP) and the Local Conference of Youth (LCOY), organized on 30 November 2019, a Colloquium on the theme: "Higher Education and Youth Employability: Innovative Strategies for Sustainable Development Goals".

The symposium, which brought together 150 participants at CERAP, was marked by :

- The inaugural conference of Professor Edouard N'gou-Milama entitled "SDOs in higher education in Africa: challenges and prospects for a requirement of organic ownership" ;
- An exchange and sharing panel that brought together academics and young employers on "The problem of employability of young people in academia" ;
- Work in task groups with a view to making recommendations.

The following summary is a summary of the conference proceedings.

SUMMARY

Every year, nearly 10 million young people - although this is still an approximate figure - enter the labour market in sub-Saharan Africa and struggle to enter the workforce. The problem of employability and unemployment of young graduates trained in African universities is therefore of paramount importance. These are the middle and senior managers that the public and private sectors need for the development of countries.

Conscious of their responsibility, African States and International Organizations such as UNESCO and the African Union, the Centre for Sustainable Development Goals for Africa (COADDA), are trying to implement the recommendations resulting from international and regional conferences and symposia, or depending on their own agendas. At the country level, national consultations or Estates General are organized by the Ministries in charge of tertiary education, with a view to developing quality human resources.

In spite of the manifest political will to promote vocational training courses, African public universities are still lagging behind considerably in terms of strategic human resources, due to the inadequacy of current efforts and the difficulties that appear at the level of state superstructures as regards the appropriation and the postures of action vis-à-vis the university, which is still confronted with problems such as massification, insufficient equipment and teaching and research staff.

As for young learners, they have for the most part remained at a traditional stage where the education system, despite the adoption of the LMD system, does not always allow them to think in depth, in a dynamic, forward-looking way. There is also a lack of information, a gap in terms of preparation and state of mind regarding the challenges that really await them on the job market.

The fact that, from the point of view of some employers¹, young graduates lag behind in terms of adequate profiles can also be explained, at the level of training institutions, by the fact that universities do not innovate much, programmes have been stagnating or have not changed sufficiently upstream for several decades, whereas in the employment situation, the professional world increasingly needs young higher education graduates who are immediately operational, autonomous, going beyond executive tasks, capable of making in-depth analyses, producing useful information to date, proposing innovative solutions, providing added value, in terms of soft or hard technology to improve the quality of the products offered by the companies in which young people have to fit in.

The responsibility of the higher education system is engaged because the issue at stake is and remains quality. The question then arises as to how to prepare young people in the university training phase to meet the requirements of employability through quality vocational training. Could not the implementation of Sustainable Development Objectives (SDOs) at the social, economic and environmental levels constitute a niche or specific approach to meet the challenges facing the populations of our countries by 2030 ? Is this not an opportunity to be seized in favour of the employability of young people, all the more so as it will fall to their generation, when

¹ During the symposium, a panel was organized for this purpose and six panellists spoke: Mrs Sandrine ROLAND, Director, AOS -Africa; Dr Eugène GOUSSIKINDEY, Director General, CERAP, Abidjan; Mrs Maimouna KONATE-HOUENOU, Deputy Director General, PROSUMA ; Dr Alain Serges Kouadio, Director General, Green Economy, Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development, Abidjan; Ms Marie Josée HOUENOU, LCOY, Climate Municipal Councillor, Abidjan; Prof Mamadou FALL, Toxicologist, Cheikh Anta Diop University, Dakar.

the time comes, the heavy responsibility of measuring and managing the expected results and providing satisfactory responses to humanity in general and to Africa in particular.

To this end, Professor Edouard Ngou-Milama, indicates that "African universities must be actors in the advent of sustainable development and the deployment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which constitute the social project for the 21st century". Emphasis should be placed on SD04 and research, which should play a transversal role in relation to all SDOs. "Universities must be able to build social, community and training engineering, taking into account education for sustainable development (ESD)", including global citizenship. Universities will have to change their behaviour by adopting a stance centred on "the requirement of organic appropriation in the context of SDOs".

With regard to the production of strategic human resources, Professor Ngou-Milama also indicated that the issue of SD/ODD must first be raised at the political level; approval is then given at the level of strategic actors, i.e. decision-makers, who will then establish - if the posture is right - a State-world economic contract of partnership with civil society. A national development plan and a national research plan will then be drawn up sequentially, and on this basis, move on to the sequence of academic approval at the level of the operational sector which is the university; the latter will then be able to draw up, within the preferential framework of education for sustainable development, a university project anchored in the National Development and Research Programmes (PND/PNR), sign a performance contract with the State, and produce research whose results will be used in a quality assurance context. In this way, strategic human resources will be produced, thus solving the problem of employability.

In the opinion of Dr. Kouadio Serges Alain, enormous opportunities are available to young people for self-employment, particularly in the field of the green economy, which is, in many ways, the concrete expression of sustainable development. It is characterized by two types of activities :

- Eco-activities that aim to protect, enhance and restore the environment. Examples include waste, renewable energy and forestry ;

- Economic activities to green : we will talk about sustainable agriculture, sustainable tourism, sustainable cities, sustainable energy,

Young graduates will thus have access to emerging and innovative professions through targeted professional training. Beyond these professions, the greening of university disciplines, without exclusion, could improve students' employability in an innovative way. To achieve this, a few recommendations have been made to policy makers and higher education and research institutions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

I - TO POLITICAL DECISION-MAKERS

Considering the situation of unemployment and low employability of young university graduates ;

Recalling the primary responsibilities of policy-makers in education, training and research for sustainable development in sub-Saharan Africa ;

The Symposium calls upon States in sub-Saharan Africa to pay particular attention to the following recommendations:

1. To implement a bold policy for the development of quality vocational training in higher education institutions with a view to employability and the fight against youth unemployment, with a view to achieving the objectives of sustainable development (SDO) by 2030 ;
2. To have at national and regional level reliable reference statistics on the employability and unemployment of young graduates ;
3. To set up, in the fight against youth unemployment, appropriate mechanisms for granting scholarships to students in the specific field of green jobs.

II - TO THE HEADS OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND RESEARCH INSTITUTIONS

1. Provide information and training of trainers on SDOs ;
2. Further promote education for sustainable development (ESD), a component of SDO 4 ("Ensuring access to quality education for all"), as a lever for transition in our societies ;
3. Develop vocational training courses within universities focusing on the green economy, a niche of opportunities to combat unemployment and to improve the employability of young people ;
4. Train young people in the tools and job opportunities offered by digital technology and social networks ;
5. Train young people in global citizenship and professional ethics in the context of SDOs ;
6. Strengthen collaboration between higher education and research institutions, the private sector, NGOs and Civil Society.