Cornell/CREA/Ministère de l'Education du Sénégal

Regional Conference on
Education in West Africa: Constraints and Opportunities
Dakar, Senegal, November 1-2, 2005

Call for Papers

Cornell University, CREA (Centre de Recherche Economique Appliquée, University Cheikh Anta Diop, Dakar), and Ministère de l’Education du Sénégal, is holding a major regional conference in Dakar, Senegal, in November, 2005. The conference organizers are Aly Mbaye (CREA) and David Sahn (Cornell University).

The education system in most countries in West Africa is facing monumental challenges. Reflecting resource inefficiencies and misallocations in the composition of public spending across educational levels, and poor quality of schooling from elementary to higher education, gross enrollment rates both at the primary and secondary levels are low, even when compared with the averages for Sub Saharan Africa. Grade repetition and dropping out of primary school before completion are serious problems. Few children proceed to lower secondary school. For those who do make it to secondary school, repetition continues to be a problem. Girls are at a particular disadvantage. Across all grades, repetition and dropout rates are systematically higher for girls than for boys.

Among children that do progress through schools, there is considerable concern about the extent of learning and cognitive outcomes. Issues of quality of teachers, characteristics of school infrastructure, supplies and equipment, the home environment and parental background, all represent concerns over the value added of going to school, and may depress demand among parents.

Clearly, the ability of countries to increase human capital, which is essential for development, has been seriously compromised by the weakness of education systems. Governments confront numerous challenges in their efforts to increase the access to basic education, to improve education quality, and to increase the efficiency of the management of the educational system. For each of these policy objectives, research is needed to understand the factors at different levels—household, school, and community—that affect education outcomes, and particularly for primary and lower secondary school.

This conference aims at bringing together various partners with a major focus on education, both on the policy side (policy-makers, international and local organizations,) and the research community (from universities and research centres), to share their
mutual experiences and findings regarding the constraint and opportunities to improve educational outcomes in West Africa.

Research topics of interest include: household and behavioural constraints to schooling demand; disparity issues (gender, spatial and other socio-economic factors); the role of the private sector; decentralization; public spending efficiency; secondary school transition; drop outs, repetition and schooling attainment; measurement and determinants of cognition outcomes; pedagogical practices and curriculum development; community schools; education-health linkages; and the impact of education on growth.

The organizers now invite submissions, completed papers or substantial abstracts (3-5 pages) to be sent electronically to ambaye@refer.sn

The submission deadline is September 15, 2005.

Decisions will be communicated by October 15, 2005. The conference will meet the travel and accommodation costs of participants based in Africa, one person per paper selected. Papers presented at the conference will in turn be considered for publication in a refereed journal or academic press volume.