



## TOWARDS PREVENTIVE REFORM EDUCATION IN THE SAHEL REGION

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It stands to reason that internal conflicts in any country impose more threat and impact than international wars do, whether such conflicts take place for religious, ethnic or political reasons in that they shake the structure of society and undermine its unity. Extremism is one of the most dangerous of these conflicts, as it threatens security, prosperity and human dignity. Taken together, education is the safety valve that protects communities. The failure of educational policies in the Sahel region, worsened by the frustrations ballooning over decades, brought about rebellion against secular formal education and the search for non-governmental Islam-based education. As a result, there was a chaos between the Arab Islam-based education and the formal secular education. The situation was further complicated and the turmoil worsened.

### CONFLICTING TRENDS

If combating extremism has become a goal set by many international organizations, such as ISESCO and UNESCO, the feasibility of these initiatives depends more on the vitality of the relationship between the state and society than on the programs implemented by these institutions.

Undoubtedly, the high-quality educational approach adopts the soft approach in combating extremism; while, governments do not always use this approach leniently and softly to maintain relationships, increase trust and set common goals with the key community leaders. Extremism has implicit manifestations, and often nest in the minds of some people during learning unknowingly.

The state often prevents the implementation of Islam-based education programs because it believes that these educational programs do not address national issues, which deepen the gap between the two parties, and erodes trust, and this dissonance may lead to the loss of opportunities for communication with actors in the future.

Education systems in most countries of the Sahel struggle to unify competing education orientations between two opposing educational visions. The first relies on Arab-Islamic education, which seeks to advance the learner spiritually rather than professionally, and the other relies on Western European education in development and improving the future.

It is well established that the development of educational policies requires careful analyses of the realities, frameworks and contexts to determine the problems encountered, and the associated advances and the possibility of improvement. Thus, it become critically essential to legitimize state interventions in school curricula through the initiatives of various actors that should be developed to define policies and strategies related to the programs, with coordination and harmonization. The extent of social consensus in educational reforms partly determines the viability of continued education systems or the necessity to introduce better reforms. However, this is not the case in most countries of the Sahel. The absence of a consensus program for the issues promoted by the state.

## **PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT**

The development of education programs is generally a three-stage configuration:

- 1) Considering the political option, and the usefulness of the programs as a future investment.
- 2) Defining the relationship between teachers and students, and developing school curricula.
- 3) The implementation phase by moving from the political sphere to the technical and educational sphere.

It has become widely known that the religious and official education systems always compete without any mutual coordination, which is a competition at the expense of national cohesion.

Today, a large group of students from the Sahel countries adopt Arab-Islamic education without the state having any direct supervision over the quality of education, without planning to integrate such students into the social and professional system. This pushes many young people into abject poverty and destitution, making them up for grabs for extremist religious groups. For instance, some Senegalese youth joined Boko Haram due to the lack of prospects for work and gain in their country.

## **FUTURE CHALLENGE**

It is recognized that school has two basic functions; first, to provide children with general knowledge that will be their tools in their future lives, known as learning; second, the development of future men and women psychologically and behaviorally, and this is education. These two tasks are part of looking towards the future. Inasmuch as any education-related decision is a prospect for the future, education in the first place is a constructive process.

There is no need for education to precede learning and training in importance and priority, and for the human being to be at the center of concern; this better reflected by Paul Valerie, who explains, “everything should depend on the idea that we have about the human being, the man of today or the man of the future.” To rebuild the human being, we should make him and her human, that is, develop in him and her the human tendency, and pay full attention to human capital.

Learning is likely to become the technology that builds people and gives them a real culture that elevates them to the future. It is not a sterile evocation of dead things; rather, it is an exploration of the creative drive that is passed on from generation to another and wafts and imparts warmth and light; it is the torch that education should preserve and develop.

Based on the foregoing, educational plans should include the goals of integration, cohesion and peace, and the impact of Arab and Islam-based education should be re-assessed to go beyond the idea of fixing identity and belief, until it is a future factor for comprehensive and sustainable development. This is a necessary option to establish peace because it makes religious education the wisdom of life. When one can have a correct and close contact with one’s Creator and a positive connection with one’s community, then one gives the best of what one has, distances oneself from introversion to serve humanity.

## **NECESSITY OF REFORM**

The advancement of education requires the adoption of a reform-oriented approach, and the reconstruction of education systems in the Sahel region. The lack of coherence yet to be displayed by education and zeitgeist of today, the inability to anticipate social transformations and the evolution of the third millennium generation are main reasons for the imbalance of education systems across a number of Muslim countries.

Hence, the pressing need to gain the appropriate means that can attract and accommodate the interest of future generations in learning and acquiring knowledge and skills to face the new development challenges and the dangerous repercussions of extremism, terrorism and sectarianism that persist stubbornly.

In the context of reform, the religious and intellectual orientation should be given special attention; extremism that leads to terrorism is usually based on a distorted interpretation of religious scriptures, purposefully concocted to entrap youth into extremism and incitement to violence and terrorism. Taken together, this makes the following points critically necessary:

1. Establishing a dialogue between religious and secular education.
2. Supporting Arab and Muslim-based education with the principles of social sciences and scientific methods to develop sound critical minds.
3. Making it imperative for all education systems in the Sahel region to accommodate rational religious education.
4. Using religious resources to build citizenship and spread tolerance and fraternity.