

## **HARNESSING THE POTENTIALS OF CROSS BORDER EDUCATION IN THE ECOWAS REGION**

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This discussion postulates the Cross Border Education in not new to the ECOWAS region. Neither is it new to the science and practice of Education. While the label (that is, the nomenclature may be new), the concept (that is, the notion) has always been with us. The discussion examines the concept in its present-day conception and goes on to explain a number of illustrative cases of Cross Border Education, beginning from 'when Africa was Africa' (pre-colonial days) through the period of colonial experience to the tempestuous and hard-hitting post-colonial years.

We are more concerned with building on that which already within our reach, instead of undertaking the wild goose chase of starting from the very scratch. The discussion therefore further highlights the semblances of Cross Border Education in the Region and throws for further discussions a number of options for transforming these initiatives into instruments for strengthened education sector integration. In so doing, suggestions will be presented on how the envisaged education sector integration can be facilitated through Open and Distance Learning (ODEL), not underplaying the serious digital divide challenges facing the ECOWAS region.

### **What Is Cross Border Education?**

The following summary description provide an insight into current perceptions of Cross Border Education

**Cross-border education** is described as the movement of people, knowledge, programs, providers and curriculum across national or regional jurisdictional borders. Cross-border education can refer to dual and joint degree programs; branch campuses; and virtual, on-line education. It is a division of "internationalization of higher education" and can be linked to development cooperation projects, academic exchange programs and commercial initiatives. Cross-border education or transnational education comes in a variety of forms ranging from twinning programs, branch campuses, joint and dual degrees and online education.

- Setting up of a branch campus or a higher education institution
- Collaboration with a local partner where the provider country institution/awarding institution controls much of the program design and delivery (e.g. teaching and assessment)

- Collaboration with a local partner where the program design comes from the home institution, but program delivery is shared
- Collaboration where the program delivery is largely delegated to a local partner
- Validation by an overseas awarding institution of a program designed and taught by a local institution
- The provider country institution employs a pure distance learning mode of delivery through use of printed materials and/or electronic delivery

This and similar widely-orchestrated characterisation fall short of our own perception of Cross-Border Education for a number of reasons:

1. There has been a concept-confusion that fails to distinguish between the TRANSBORDER and the CROSS BORDER. The latter operate along a giver-receiver mode, while the latter is more of a partnership among equals, in which both giving and receiving is in the form of an arrow pointing both ways
2. Existing conceptions seem to have tackled education challenges from the roof, rather than from the roots. The emphasis has been wholly on higher education, while our stand is that higher education cannot be as high as it should be if basic education fails to build the solid foundation that should be its role
3. The term 'internationalisation' as applied to the subject under discussion is a misnomer, as it represents one-directional movement that assumes that the giver owns and knows it all while the receiver remains in a state of perpetual dependency.

We would therefore consider CROSS BORDER EDUCATION as a synergetic partnership of equal status partners in a networking arrangement of 'du donner et du recevoir', in the words of Senghor. Under such an arrangement, every partner has something of value to contribute to the common pool of education sector undertaking as well as something of value to take away.

We would also be operating in the realms of EDUCATION WITH A CAPITAL 'E'. This is a view that weaves together the four inter-locking routes to Education – incidental, informal, non-formal and formal. It also takes into consideration the pipeline inter-relationship of various levels of education basic, secondary, tertiary and even quaternary.

In the discussions that follow, we would be viewing Cross border education from this specific lens. It would be necessary at this point to

emphasize that the world has in fact moved from trans-border, cross border, Trans-border to BODERLESS EDUCATION and that this should be our goal as a regional political and socio-economic union.

### **Manifestations Of Cross Border Education in Western Africa**

Cross Border Education has always been with us, especially when we operate from the more holistic perspective of EDUCATION WITH A CAPITAL 'E'. As explained in the paragraphs that follow, whatever the epoch in the evolution of our societies, education-related partnerships has been an instrument of interaction among populations in different locations

#### ***Pre-Colonial Era***

Education is the cumulative effect of Learning, and Learning is a response to stimuli that come from one's confrontation/interaction with others (persons, cultures, languages, values, attitudes, habits, fads and fashions, events/happenings,): also with natural and social phenomena. The impact of such encounter is EXPERIENCE, and whenever this is modified in some way by the encounter we have had, we said to have learned. This implies that our life (outlook, skills, knowledge, values, horizon, attitudes, behaviour, etc. will never be the same again.

Viewed from this perspective, every inter-community encounter –trade, social relationships, and even wars--served as opportunities for mutual inter-group learning in pre-colonial West Africa. In most cases, the mutual learning was incidental. It could move to the realms of the informal and the non-formal, as in cases in which farmers mingled with herders, herders and farmers with metal workers, etc.

Africa's national boundaries were not strictly wire-fenced in pre-colonial times and one did not need passports, visas and laissez-passer to cross them. Even though there occasional skirmishes between neighbouring peoples, there was considerable mingling, while some nations, through travels and trade, expanded their territories with their languages spreading far beyond their traditional homes. This gave rise to the enduring legacy of cross-border languages in region, with the following as glaring examples:

1. Hausa: the language with perhaps the widest spread in the region
2. Fulfubé (Pula, Fulah): a language that has spread from the Fouta Djallon in modern Guinea to parts of Central Africa
3. Kanuri : a language shard by Nigeria, Tchad and Niger
4. Yoruba: the language of South West Nigeria as well as parts of Benin and Togo
5. Aja (Gunu/Ewe/Mina): used by population extending from Lagos and Ogun States of Nigeria to parts of Benin, Togo and Ghana

6. Wolof: the lingua franca of Senegal, The Gambia and parts of Mauritania
7. Bambara/Soninke/Mandingue: widely used in parts of Senegal, Mali, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Burkina Faso
8. Akan (group of related languages): with powerful influence in Togo, Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire
9. Susu: language of powerful forces in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone
10. Krio: wide spread in Sierra Lone and The Gambia
11. Mossi (More): shared between Northern Ghana and Burkina Faso
12. Bariba: goes by different names in different places; used by populations in parts of Nigeria, Benin and Togo

This is simply a snap shot and the challenge is for linguists to provide us with more accurate mapping of these other cross border languages of Western Africa. Of direct concern to the discussion here is the fact that these languages did spread across borders through inter-communal contacts. These contacts resulted not only in the acquisition of new languages, and not simply in the languages adapting and growing through new encounters, the languages also became a vehicle for culture contact and cultural exchanges. The contacts therefore qualify as vectors of Education, since Acculturation is a major function of Education.

### ***The Colonial Period***

The colonial powers in West Africa (Great Britain, France and Portugal) instituted a loose federation of the countries under their control. In British West Africa, a number of educational institutions grew up as cross-border schools, with students drawn from every other English-speaking country of the region. This was the case with Achimota in Ghana, Fourah Bay in Sierra Leone, and Yaba Higher College in Nigeria

In 'l'Afrique Occidentale Française', William Ponty College in Senegal was a cross-border institution that trained most of the post-independence leaders of the French-speaking countries of our region. The same is true of the University of Dakar (now Universite Cheikh Anta Diop de Dakar—UCAD) that remained a regional university for decades after its establishment in 1948.

Education system and curricula in West Africa under colonial rule mirrored whatever happened in the métropole. Thus, schools in British colonies memorised British Empire History while students in French colonies chanted 'nos ancêtres les Gaulois'. Of direct relevance to our discussion here is the fact that there was a strong element of cross-border education, as school

practices and curricula were uniform across national boundaries both in Anglophone and Francophone countries. It is also likely the same goes for the countries under Portuguese rule (Cape Verde and Guinea Bissau), countries in which the prevailing colonial policy produce a large number of ‘assimilados’.

Colonial education systems in fact produced a two directional cross border education phenomenon. First is the flow from Europe to the West African colonies of the three colonising powers. Second is the cross border coverage of whatever came from the European powers

### ***The Post-Independence Years***

#### **Signs of Turbulence**

Three main factors (wars and conflicts, political instability and economic difficulties) account for the turbulent nature of post-independence West Africa. These conditions have led to massive movements of peoples

- from Guinea (following the economic crisis that followed the Sekou Toure’s NO of 1958) to neighbouring countries –often homes of kindred peoples-:The Gambia, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Liberia
- from Ghana (in the years of great economic difficulties): to Nigeria and beyond
- from Nigeria (mainly in the Biafran war years) to Benin, Togo, Ghana, Côte d’Ivoire and further afield
- from Sierra Leone and Liberia (fuelled by civil conflicts) to Guinea, Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana, Nigeria, and more
- From Guinea-Bissau to The Gambia, Senegal, etc.

For both the populations on the move and their host populations the massive movements have been a veritable education experience. There have been new vistas on both sides that have changed people’s lives.

### **Business and Culture Vehicle**

#### ***Business***

On a much happier note, enterprise in the fields of business and culture has helped to enhance cross border sharing of knowledge and the broadening of the horizon of people. In business, the under-reported efforts of cross border traders (a large proportion of who are women) have been a fruitful learning experience for our people. The banking sector (particularly Nigerian banks) has been playing a prominent role in promoting mutual learning in business and financial fields.

### ***Cultural Productions***

In the area of Culture, Music and the Performing Arts have been the major agents of cross border education. Ghanaian highlife, Nigerian afro beat, lusophone-francophone Cuba-originated Pachanga, along with contributions by Bambeya Jazz of Guinea, Magic System of Cote d'Ivoire, Youssou Ndour of Senegal, Cesara Eborá of Cape Verde, and others have (through a process of cross border learning) fused into a music and dance step that is truly West African and that has spread all over the region, breaking down language barriers.

NOLLYWOOD, the film industry originating from Nigeria, has spread to all parts of West Africa and beyond. It is still growing at a phenomenal rate. Its features are being copied everywhere, its productions are watched and appreciated, and it is exerting some positive influence on people, making us proud to be ourselves. That renewed confidence in ourselves is Education.

West Africa has remained home to great literacy giants whose creative works have been translated across linguistic borders and are studied in schools in virtually all countries of the ECOWAS region, with extracts regularly quoted in both intellectual and popular discourse. It is a growing list, of which the following are quite prominent

1. Leopold Sedar Senghor (Senegal)
2. Wole Soyinka (Nigeria): Nobel Prize Winner
3. Chinua Achebe (Nigeria)
4. Camara Laye
5. Cheikh Hamidou Kane (Senegal)
6. Ayikwei Armah (Ghana)
7. Ama Atta Aidoo (Ghana)
8. Aminata Sow Fall (Senegal)
9. Amicar Cabral (Cape Verde)
10. Sembene Ousmane (Senegal)
11. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (Nigeria)

One short-lived experience (and a missed opportunity) is the influx of teachers of French from neighbouring West African countries (mainly Benin, Togo and Guinea) into Nigeria from the 1960s to the 1980s. Their presence was a curriculum enriching boost for Nigerian secondary schools during those decades. The teacher brought French into the school and classroom. They organised excursions into French-speaking countries, and were very active in the examination and curriculum reforms for French then carried on by the Nigerian Association of French Teachers (NAFT).

A number of these teachers went on to study in Nigerian universities and failed to return to teaching. Others took advantage of the booming oil-economy of Nigeria of the early 1980's to go into other forms of employment. Their numbers were later to decline with the devaluation of the Nigerian Naira by the mid-1980s and with the poor status accorded them by the authorities.

***Today's Formal and Informal Arrangements***  
**Nigerian Students in Ghana**

As the box below shows, admission into Nigerian universities have become tight in recent years and, Ghanaian universities have been the gainers. Efforts by Ghanaian universities to woo Nigerian students are in fact being highly intensified by the day. The 2014 figure of 75,000 Nigerians studying in Ghana must therefore have since been overshot.

BOX 1: DESTINATION GHANA FOR NIGERIAN STUDENTS

Subsequent critical assessment of Ghana's institutions has highlighted their good, bad and the ugly sides - along with the extraordinary news that there are now some 75,000 Nigerians studying in Ghana. Nigerians highly value education and families dream of producing a graduate. But there are not nearly enough places in universities.

Every year about 1.5 million school leavers sit for compulsory entrance examinations into 150 public and private universities whose approved carrying capacity is 600,000 students.

It is not surprising that Ghana has become a destination for many of the very large number of Nigerian students who do not gain access to higher education at home (UNIVERSITY WORLD NEWS: no 332, 14 May 2014)

This steady flow of Nigerian students to universities in Ghana is an informal arrangement, as it does not seem to have been the result of any official arrangement between the two counties. The flow has also been largely a one-directional affair and therefore falls short of our requirements (as set out earlier in this discussion) of a synergic network arrangement of the 'donner et recevoir' variety.

### **French Language Immersion Programmes**

These programmes were initially designed by the French as institutions, attached to universities, to support the spread of the study of French in Anglophone universities. They have however been domesticated by different African States and have vigorously pursued language immersion that goes along with exposure to the life and people of the host countries, thus contributing to the emergence of a corps of ‘franglophone’ Africans.

Guinea was the first to send students to Nigeria (University of Lagos) in the early 60s and to receive students from Nigeria. Most of the Guinean students went on to take bachelor’s degree programmes of Lagos University, a few pursued academic careers in that University, while a good number never returned to Guinea, as political instability reigned in that country. Political instability in Guinea may also have accounted for the abrupt ending of the exchange programme. However, while it lasted, the programme yielded mutual educational benefits to both countries.

**Theof Dakar and Abidjan Faculties of Letters** - established flourishing specialised units of *Français langue étrangère* for French language immersion in the 60s. Both institutions welcomed hundreds of students from Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone and The Gambia for decades. They have remained ever active and have expanded their clientele to include a wider audience of businessmen, civil servants and diplomats. One important point here is that these immersion programmes were not simply about France and French language but also about the host West African countries.

As explained in the following entry on its website, **TheVillage du Benin** of l’Université du Bénin, Lomé-Togo has expanded the scope of its activities to include language research and development and has succeeded in creating a multicultural environment in its precincts;

Created by Decree in 1968 and under the supervision of the Ministry of Higher Education and Research of Togo, the **International Center for Research and Study of Languages -Village of Benin (CIREL-VB)** mainly teaches French Foreign (FLE), research in language study, English courses and vocational training.

The CIREL-Village of Benin pursues objectives of diffusion of French and African values through the promotion of languages and culture. As a center of excellence and reference in constant innovation, CIREL-VB has acquired new pedagogical compet @ nces .

CIREL-Village of Benin has the support of the Ministry of Higher Education and Research, French Cooperation and the International

Organization of La Francophonie. He is also a founding member of the RECFLEA *Network of French Language Centers in Africa*. Located on the University Campus of Lomé, CIREL-VB promotes a real immersion in a Francophone and multicultural environment. (<https://www.cirel.ub.tg>-accessed on 07/10/2018)

**The West African Examinations Council (WAEC)** has been in active existence since 1952. Established originally as an initiative of Cambridge and London Examinations Syndicates, its statutes were ratified by the legislators of its original member States in the mid-1950s and later by a fifth member in the 1990s.

WAEC, a joint venture of The Gambia, Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria and Sierra Leone, has influenced curriculum development at the secondary level in these countries. It administers a common end-of-secondary cycle examination, using a common syllabus, and serviced by international subject committees on which all Member States are represented.

WAEC is a success story, whose future growth could be in two main directions: expanding its activities to cover French and Portuguese-speaking countries, and more desirable and easier still, work with these countries in developing their language zone-specific common examination mechanisms

#### ***Our Discarded regional conventions***

We are here concerned with the following three regional/sub-regional conventions with direct relationship with the promotion of Cross Border Education in the ECOWAS region.

#### **The Arusha Convention**

The full title of that agreement was the “Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Certificates, Diplomas, Degrees and Other Academic Qualifications in Higher Education in the African States. It was adopted on 5 December 1981 in Arusha, Tanzania, with a view to promoting regional co-operation through the academic mobility of lecturers and students. It was revised in Addis Ababa in in 2011. Ratification by Member States has been slow, and the question has been ‘why is this so, given that African students are among the most mobile in the world?’

### **UEMOA (West African Economic and Monetary Union)**

The Union is presented on its website in the following words:

Created on January 10, 1994 in Dakar, the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA) has as its main objective, the construction, in West Africa, of a harmonized and integrated economic area, within which is ensured a freedom of movement of persons, capital, goods, services and factors of production, as well as the effective enjoyment of the right of exercise and establishment for the liberal professions, residence for citizens throughout Community territory.

Eight coastal and Sahelian states, linked by the use of a common currency, the FCFA and benefiting from common cultural traditions, make up UEMOA: Benin, Burkina, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Niger, Senegal and Togo. UEMOA covers an area of 3,506,126 km<sup>2</sup> and has 120.2 million inhabitants

This otherwise fertile ground for Cross Border Education has been battling with three main challenges:

- developing an Education specific policy
- developing a sub-regional collaboration mechanism or the *baccalauréat* (end of the secondary cycle) examination
- moving from a regime of multiple doctorate degrees to the *doctorat unique*—a change that has been effected in France but on which UEMOA has been 'experimenting' for some time

### **ECOWAS Education Protocol**

It is difficult to fault the intentions of the ECOWAS Protocol on Education and Training, which is reproduced here in detail.

By the terms of this Protocol, Member States undertake to cooperate in the areas of education and training with a view to achieving the following objectives:

- a. to set up an efficient system linking the Member States, for the collation and exchange of information and data on the present and projected education and training needs of the Region;
- b. to mobilise resources of Member States for the creation of mechanisms and institutions which will produce the professional, technical, research and management cadres needed to facilitate the development of the Region in every sector;

- C. to encourage and coordinate efforts by the Member States to formulate and implement comparable educational and training policies, strategies and systems appropriate to their needs;
- d. to formulate and implement policies and strategies involving the private sector, non-governmental organisations and other parties interested in education and training;
- e. to encourage and coordinate the formulation and implementation of policies, strategies and programmes aimed at promoting the study and application of the sciences, technology, computer programming, and research and development;
- F. to reduce and eliminate the constraints preventing nationals of Member States, both men and women, from having access to a good education and from availing
- G . . . to promote the education of girls and ensure girls' full access to and achievement in all levels of the educational system

### **Building on What We Have**

Regional Integration appears to be going on (certainly not without problems) among the ordinary peoples of the ECOWAS region. Informal/traditional Cross-border interaction still goes on in various forms. Whatever the form it takes, it carries along with it a form of Education—people learning as they move with the acquisition and application of new knowledge, skills, values, attitudes and life perspectives.

Cultural productions (literature, music, theatre, fashion, etc. have moved across physical boundaries, propelled by modern technology. It can in fact be said that, to a great extent, the ECOWAS region is beginning to speak with a single voice in matters of culture-related productions.

Ordinary people criss-crossing international borders have been acquiring the two official languages of the region for functional use. This is a feat that is yet to be fully realised by the formal school teaching of these languages

The rapid expansions of Nigerian banks to other countries of the region (and the rising importance of Eco Bank in intra-regional business transactions) have shown that high business can in fact thrive across borders in the region, without strict control by government.

For the purpose of this discussion, the important point is that the above inter-communal activities are educative in that they have contributed to enriching our peoples by positively transforming the way they see and do things.

Formal structures have been put in place to formalise what has been happening informally (and even imperceptibly) in the form of Cross Border Education. Institutions have sprung up for French language immersion, but there is little evidence of a counterpart arrangement for English and Portuguese. The West African Examinations Council has been a success story, but how best can its case be replicated, and its experience built upon?

All this point to the need for us to capitalise on the little that has been achieved, building upon the modest gains of our people's efforts, while mending the cracks in existing formal structures. This we can approach by using what we have to get what we want, by making the best of:

- Our People
- Our Structures
- Our Institutions
- Our Instruments
- Our Politics

### ***Our People: Capitalising on Folk Ingenuity***

Carrying the people along is a development planning singsong everywhere. The ordinary folks of West Africa (along with local authorities) can contribute to regional integration through their own way, and that way seems to work. What is needed is for governments in the region to create an enabling environment for folk ingenuity to thrive in a fully legal manner. Their strength lies more in promoting non-formal education (literacy in cross border official and community languages, technical and business/commercial and agribusiness skills acquisition). Modest efforts by hundreds of adjacent grassroots communities across official boundaries, if sustained, would be a boost to education and socio-economic development that should spring from 'down there'. Efforts along these lines can in fact lay a solid foundation for cross border education at formal level.

Twining arrangements by community schools across borders would also be a way of 'catching them young' – developing ECOWAS-spirited citizens from an early age.

### ***Our Structures***

Action on several fronts would be needed to strengthen the education, training and research institutions in the region whose activities already border on Cross Border Education along the following strategic lines

1. Inventory of Cross Border Education-Related Structures in the Region (There is certainly a lot of unreported work going on. Collecting and sharing information on these initiatives would be a good starting point)

2. Twinning Arrangements for structures serving similar purposes Action on 1 above would produce information needed to know who is working where, and on what, thus helping to determining who should be working with who on precisely what)
3. Across-border exchanges of students and teachers at pre-tertiary level (Leading private schools in the region would be in a better financial position to do this. A first step could be among students using the same official language. The method can also be used for language immersion, as well as for school-based teacher development programmes)
4. Replication of Language Immersion programmes by universities in English-speaking countries (We have examples of reputable institutions for French language immersion. It would help the cause of Cross Border Education if a similar initiative could be developed in Anglophone countries for the consolidation of English language skills targeting francophone students, teachers, public servants, entrepreneurs, diplomats, etc.)
5. Cross Border stretching of strong national specialised training and research institutions (A good number of these exist in the countries of the region and can be encouraged to 'internationalise' by reaching out to other countries)

### ***Our Institutions***

It would be necessary for the following institutions to look into ways further improving on their methods of operation, with a view to enhancing their capacity as agents of Cross Border Education in the ECOWAS region.

1. ECOWAS would need to look into the possibility of establishing antennas or working groups on specific aspects of the Education and Training Protocol in Member States. If these are made to work, it would become easier to reach consensus on the modalities of operation, and the mobilisation of resources for implementation. Such working groups would also serve as avenues for monitoring on-going activities at national levels, as contribution to regional reports and as guides for decision-making at ECOWAS level.
2. UEMOA would benefit from closer collaboration with Anglophone institutions in the ECOWAS region (commissions for higher education, WAEC, etc.). This would facilitate the process of learning from one's neighbours and be mutually enriching to all sides.

3. WAEC has a success as well as a process story to tell and to share with non-member countries. -reaching out to UEMOA and individual Francophone countries. The former is its achievement; the latter; the methods of arriving at the successful results. Sharing these with UEMOA states would assist in the efforts by the latter to introduce a regional baccalauréat examination. It would also be a forward step in promoting Cross Border Education at the pre-tertiary level.

### ***Our Instruments***

The major instrument of concern to this discussion is the ECOWAS Protocol on Education and Training. It is a fairly dense document with 22 articles. An important question that arises from one's experience in administering instruments of this nature is 'to what extent is the Instrument known?' Related to that is 'If at all it is known, to what extent has it been internalised?' The second question is important because it deals with being in sync with the spirit (and not just the letter of the Instrument. In most cases, implementation becomes easier when a document like this is fully internalised by persons and institutions expected to work with it.

Continuing publicity is a requirement here. This calls for the production of a 'popular' version of the Protocol, in addition to an audio-visual one.

There is also need for continuous stakeholder engagement on key thorny issues in the Protocol, mainly:

1. Staff and student mobility
2. Centres of Excellence
3. Cooperation in Publishing
4. Resources
5. Relationship with other regional and international organisations

### ***Our Politics***

Our major politics-related problem is the rapid turnover of political office holders, in our specific case, the Ministers of Education. Related to this is the habit of every new minister jettisoning the policies of his or her predecessor. In some countries, there are several ministers 'in charge of Education, with unclear mandates on who does what. It is in fact unusual in pan-African meetings for some minister to react to regional and sub-regional issues by saying 'I was not told about this'.

At a higher level, there is the unhelpful practice of rushing to sign up to conventions and not following up on our return from related regional/international meetings at which the conventions were adopted. This in

turn leads to a situation in which the direct implementers and the wider body of stakeholders are not informed of such conventions.

One way out of this situation is the involvement of civil society in both the adoption processes and in-country implementation. Public information on conventions would also need to be intensified, with a greater focus on groups that really matter.

### **Role of Open-Distance Learning**

Cross Border Education involves REACHING OUT to the beneficiary the beneficiary and DRAWING IN the beneficiary to the provider. It Operates on a network of synergic interaction and follows a process of BORDER CROSSING. It thrives on Knowledge and Ideas that transform people and their lives. It has now become a BORDERLESS undertaking, as ODEL makes border crossing seamless as knowledge becomes openly accessible.

In deploying ODEL to the strengthening of Cross Border Education, one can think of the following six levels of possibilities:

- Government to Government
- Institution to Institution
- Project to Project
- Process to Process (Activity to Activity)
- Group to Group
- Person to Person

In all these cases INTERACTIVE, REAL TIME methodology should prevail

#### **● Virtual and not Uniquely Physical**

The SMART CITIES concept (municipalities that use information and communication technologies to increase operational efficiency, share information with the public and improve both the quality of government services and citizen welfare all the way,) would need to be pursued: campuses, schools, offices, homes, open spaces, recreational facilities, work places, etc.

ALL conventional and social mass media should find a place, it would be necessary, while it would be desirable to establish working relationships with major Tele-Communications /TV/Radio regulators and companies in the region.

The Open University Concept is fast gaining ground in Africa, as the table below shows.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>Headquarter</b>	<b>Country</b>
1. <u>National Open University of Nigeria</u>	Public	<u>Abuja</u>	<u>Nigeria</u>
2. <u>Open University of Mauritius</u>	Public	<u>Réduit, Moka District</u>	<u>Mauritius</u>
3. <u>Open University of Sudan</u>	Public	<u>Khartoum, Khartoum</u>	<u>Sudan</u>
4. <u>Open University of Tanzania</u>	Public	<u>Dar es Salaam</u>	<u>Tanzania</u>
5. <u>Open University of West Africa</u>	Private	<u>Accra, Greater Accra Region</u>	<u>Ghana</u>
6. <u>Zambian Open University</u>	Private	<u>Lusaka</u>	<u>Zambia</u>
7. <u>Zimbabwe Open University</u>	Public	<u>Harare</u>	<u>Zimbabwe</u>
8. <u>Islamic Online University</u>	Private	<u>Kanifing</u>	<u>Gambia</u>

Federating the West African institutions on the list could be one way of giving a boost to Cross Border Education in the ECOWAS region

### ***A Highlight on Challenges***

That Open Distance Learning can give a boost to Cross Border Education in the ECOWAS region is not in doubt. However, every effort to effect the boost must seriously address the following challenges:

1. The inadequacy of critical ICT infrastructure
2. the poor level of ICT penetration in the Region
3. the slow pace of ICT adoption at all levels
4. The official language divide (French and English tearing us apart)
5. Hop-step-and-no-jump mentality (failure to pursue initiatives to fruition)

### **Conclusion**

This discussion will conclude simply in order to continue, as it has raised issues on which much in-depth deliberations would be needed. It is however pertinent to highlight the following for the purpose of emphasis:

- i. Cross Border Education is not new to our peoples; it was probably not called by that name
- ii. Cross Border Education is a lot more than formal higher education
- iii. There is a plethora of initiatives in the region to be capitalised upon
- iv. Great lessons do flow from informal initiatives in the region
- v. More in-depth publicity to existing conventions would be needed to ensure internalisation, which is a prelude to successful implementation of programmes
- vi. ODL is surely a boost to Cross Border Education, BUT the technical and other issues raised in the course of this discussion must be taken along.

Finally, moving the Cross Education process forward would require a four-point strategy, as follows:

- i. Serious and urgent attention to the great language divide in the region, to improve intra-regional understanding.
- ii. Treat the ICT critical infrastructure as a priority, as a transversal challenge that can hinder development in all sectors
- iii. Federating of the Open University institutions in the region, and their subsequent mobilisation to champion the cause of Cross Border Education in the ECOWAS region.
- iv. Urgent tactical shift from the prevailing Hop-Step—and a refusal to jump mentality-----a failure to follow projects through to fruition---- that has led to the stalling of ideas, largely explaining why Conventions (like the ECOWAS Protocol on Education and Training has remained a paper instrument, hardly known and seen where the action really is.