Introduction

When UNESCO was established in 1945 only one African state—Egypt—participated in its creation, and by 1958, UNESCO still had only eight member states from this region: Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Liberia, Libya, Morocco, Sudan and Tunisia. However, following decolonisation, the African states joined UNESCO in large numbers, mainly in 1960/1, and at the time of writing number fifty in total. This chapter traces the history of UNESCO’s involvement in Africa’s development in response to African member states’ needs and expectations, and UN initiatives. It argues that UNESCO’s approach to peace and development is particularly appropriate for Africa as it stresses the development of endogenous capacities and the cultural dimension of development rather than neoliberal models of development often imposed on African countries by international financial institutions, which have not brought peace and prosperity to Africa. UNESCO believes that peace and development are ‘indissolubly linked’ and are ‘two sides of the same coin’. Peace, in the longer term, is not dependent on successful peacekeeping, as Malcolm Harper pointed out in Chapter 11 of this volume, but on ‘constructing the defences of peace in the minds of men’ as the preamble to UNESCO’s constitution asserts. Since the late 1980s UNESCO has considered Africa to be a priority and this trend is likely to continue well into the twenty-first century. UNESCO’s medium-term strategy (1996–2001) has four priority groups: Women, Youth, Less Developed Countries, and Africa. The medium-term strategy and the programme and budget for 1996–7 and 1998–9 were based on the recommendations made and standards and targets set by the Africans themselves in 1995 at the Audience Africa Conference, and the UN system-wide initiative on
Africa that was launched in 1996. The emphasis is, however, on educa-
tion, since that is UNESCO's main field of activity, and on the 'acqui-
sition, sharing and transfer of knowledge' because UNESCO believes that
'a peace based exclusively upon the political and economic arrange-
ments of governments would not be a peace which could secure the
unanimous, lasting and sincere support of the peoples of the world, and
that the peace must therefore be founded, if it is not to fail, upon the
intellectual and moral solidarity of mankind.'

**UNESCO's initial action in Africa**

It would be slightly inaccurate to say that UNESCO's role in Africa began
only after the African countries joined UNESCO, as it had played a role
in bringing about decolonization in Africa. Numerous strongly-worded
resolutions were passed by the UNESCO General Conference between
1960 and 1972. At its eleventh session in 1960, the General Conference
passed a resolution entitled 'The role of UNESCO in contributing to the
attainment of independence by colonial countries and peoples', which
declared that 'colonialism in all its forms and all its manifestations must
be speedily abolished, and that accession to freedom and independence
must not be delayed on the false pretext that a particular territory has
not reached a sufficiently high standard in economic, social, educa-
tional and cultural matters'. It also declared that 'UNESCO has a vital
part to play in promoting the freedom and independence of colonial
countries and peoples through its programmes in the fields of educa-
tion, science and culture', and that 'one of UNESCO's most urgent tasks is
to help the newly independent countries, and those which are preparing
for independence to overcome any harmful after effects of colonialism,
such as economic, social and cultural underdevelopment, illiteracy and
the serious shortage of trained personnel'.

UNESCO asserted that the formal educational system in Africa was in
transition from the colonial to the post-colonial period. Warning
against cultural hegemony, UNESCO criticised both metropolitan
powers and local African elites who had been brainwashed by European
education into devaluing their peoples' own culture. UNESCO argued
that the schools in Africa were an extension of the metropolitan struc-
ture, as were the economy, polity and social structure. As long as the
national bourgeoisie in its colonial role dominated the domestic pyr-
amidal structure, we can expect that the education system would prevent
liberation on two levels: liberation from the definition of culture and
development by the high-income imperial nations; and liberation from