

South Africa hosts first-ever Africa Continental Play-based Learning Conference

Pretoria, South Africa, 11 February 2019

Ensuring that the children of Africa are adequately prepared for the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century, as defined by its fast-paced social, economic and technological change, requires the re-thinking and re-imagining of traditional approaches to learning. An education system that supports the development of skills such as problem solving, critical thinking and creativity will be crucial for success.

A growing body of research is pointing to play-based learning as a key means of improving children's academic performance and personal development. From infancy, children have a natural ability to learn about the world through play. Play-based learning creates a space in which children are free to experiment, explore, analyse, tackle and solve problems using their inherent capabilities such as curiosity and imagination.

"Experts worldwide, acknowledge that today's children need more than the traditional 3-Rs (i.e. reading, writing and arithmetic) to prepare for 21st century opportunities. As Government, we are paving the way towards the 21st century opportunities, by preparing our children in the four critical areas, namely the 4-Cs – Collaboration and teamwork; Creativity and imagination; Critical thinking; and Communication," said Ms. Angie Motshekga, South Africa's Minister for Basic Education, during the media launch held at the Department of Basic Education on 11 February.

With this reality in mind, the Department of Basic Education of the Republic of South Africa, together with UNICEF South Africa, the LEGO Foundation, and the ADEA will host the inaugural Continental Play-Based Learning for the 21st century skills Conference in Pretoria, from February 25 to 27, 2019.

'All children, everywhere, have the right to play. And yet, play is often undervalued both by parents and by many preschool and education systems. Let's work on changing this together', said Mr. Sanjay Wijesekera, UNICEF South Africa's Representative.

The conference brings together Ministers responsible for education and early childhood development from across the continent, academics, policy-makers, high-level representatives from development agencies, the private sector, civil society, and the media. The conference will afford education Ministers and stakeholders an opportunity to interact with the leading scientists and together, embrace the practice of learning through play for the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals. Ministers will have space to caucus amongst themselves, give reflections on the three-day conference, and finally co-create a communique on embracing learning through play for quality improvement. The conference champions the continental education strategy from the foundational stage through the entire continuum of learning.

Mr. John Goodwin, CEO of the LEGO Foundation, said: "For the past 10 years we have worked closely with the Department of Basic Education and UNICEF in South Africa to bring the transformative power of play into children's lives to help them become creative, engaged, lifelong learners and the LEGO Foundation is honored and excited to be co-hosting the first conference in Africa exploring learning through play."

"It is time to put in place all the necessary mechanisms for an effective implementation and integration of play-based learning for the 21st century skills in the African education systems in order to improve the quality of early childhood development", said Mr. Albert Nsengiyumva, Executive Secretary of the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA).

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About the LEGO Foundation

The LEGO Foundation aims to inspire and develop the builders of tomorrow; a mission that it shares with the LEGO Group. The LEGO Foundation is dedicated to building a future where learning through play empowers children to become creative, engaged, lifelong learners. Its work is about re-defining play and re-imagining learning. In collaboration with thought leaders, influencers, educators and parents the LEGO Foundation aims to equip, inspire and activate champions for play.

www.LEGOfoundation.com

About UNICEF

UNICEF was founded in 1946 to help children in countries devastated by World War II. Now operating in more than 190 countries and territories, it has helped save more young lives than any other humanitarian organization. UNICEF has had a presence in South Africa since the end of apartheid and continues to work towards bettering the lives of children in the country. UNICEF South Africa Country Office works with a range of partners in government, civil society, academia and various other sectors to create a safer and healthier environment for every child in the country.

www.unicef.org

About ADEA

The Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) is a forum for policy dialogue. It is a partnership bringing together African policymakers in charge of education, science and technology; development partners; researchers and education technical experts. ADEA contributes to the empowerment of African countries to develop quality education and training systems that respond to the countries' emergent needs and drive social and economic transformation sustainably.

www.adeanet.org