

ICT can spur Africa's education and training transformation, Ministers' forum in Tunis hears

Continent can 'leapfrog' to high-tech teaching methods, global education guru asserts

Tunis, December 10, 2013. More and better education is crucial for Africa's continued economic growth and for the job opportunities that such growth brings for the continent's population. To that end, Africa's educators must invest much more time, money and effort in information and communication technology (ICT).

However, a leading worldwide expert on education declared that success in integrating ICT into its education and training sectors was within Africa's grasp.

Those were two of the central messages heard today at the First African Ministerial Forum in ICT Integration in Education and Training, taking place between 9 and 11 December 2013 in Tunis. The Forum started yesterday with a High-Level Policy Workshop preceding a two-day Ministerial Meeting.

The forum is co-organized by the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA), the African Development Bank (AfDB), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the *Organisation internationale de la francophonie* (OIF) and US computing and semiconductor company, Intel, under the auspices of Tunisia, through its ministry of education.

The aim of the forum is to boost the ability of African education ministers to introduce strong policies on ICT to accelerate the transformation of education and training on the continent.

Mr. Boukary Savadogo, chief of the AfDB's education division, emphasized how important ICT was to the Bank, and how it was an important tool in fighting unemployment in Africa.

Fenchun Miao, ICT in education specialist at UNESCO, said ICT was the key to "better learning for all." He said it was one of the "vital pillars" for the post-2013 education agenda.

He added that his organization was developing the ability of teachers around the world in the use of ICT in education. "UNESCO", he said, "has already been successful in this goal in Asia, working with Intel". "We hope we can do the same thing in Africa." he added.

He welcomed the initiative that resulted in the forum and declared: "I sincerely hope this is just the start of our cooperation."

Mr. Moise Leye, Intel's Africa corporate affairs director, welcomed the large and varied attendance at the forum, saying: "Your presence here shows your commitment to make ICT a powerful tool for education growth."

He said there was a "sense of urgency" about the task ahead and the need for "education for all on the African continent."

Mr. Hamidou Boukary, ADEA's acting Executive Secretary, echoed Mr Leye, saying: "We at ADEA are heartened by the large and quality turn-out at this event."

He said that Africa's economic growth rate was attracting more and more direct investment and that called for improving the quality of education and training for Africans. Africa needed to "unleash its tremendous potential."

He remarked that the challenges ahead were "implementation, implementation, implementation" and "scaling up, scaling up, scaling up."

In her ministerial remarks, the Honourable Marie Jacqueline Nana Togole, Mali's minister of national education, said her government had drawn up a policy document to introduce ICT at all levels of the country's education system.

ICT, she said, put at the service of education would enable Mali to improve access to education and improve the education system in general.

Dr. Peck Cho, distinguished professor at Korea's Dongguk University, a world-renowned education expert, known as "the teacher of teachers", gave a lecture on "Smart media in education: a blessing or a curse?"

In the talk, he described Korea's remarkable transformation from one of the poorest nations in the world to one of the most dynamic countries in just one generation.

Dr. Cho said much of Korea's success was due to the government deciding to concentrate on education. Korea, he said, had "no oil, no coal, no iron", in short, no resources, so the country decided to invest in human capital.

By 2009, he said, Korea had become "the most wired on earth". Nine out of ten Korean schoolchildren has a smartphone.

ICT has transformed education, said Dr. Cho. In his 20 years of teaching, he had reached perhaps 4,000 students using traditional methods. Now, with ICT, he could reach 40,000 students in one year only using distance learning.

Dr. Cho said that ICT and distance learning were a gift to Africa in its mission to improve and spread education on the continent.

He said Africa could "leapfrog" into the new world of ICT-based education in the same way the continent did not need to construct a huge, wire-based telephone infrastructure now that mobile phones were a reality.

Africa's education system could become much better and widespread without "building schools in every village and every corner of Africa".

Dr. Cho noted that Africa needed to integrate ICT into its education system, but three other conditions had to be met. These were reform in teacher education, curricula reform and leadership in education.

He was optimistic about Africa's prospects, and the outlook of its young people. He concluded: "If Korea did it in 50 years, you can do it in ten years."

The 1st African Forum on the Integration of ICTs in Education and Training will end tomorrow. It will conclude with a ministerial panel that will formulate and issue the recommendations of the meeting.

The Forum will be officially closed by the Honorable Moncef Ben Salem, Tunisia's Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research.

Further information on the Forum is available at <http://www.africaictedu.org/>
Follow the proceedings of the Forum Live: <http://africaictedu.info/>

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