14th Ministerial Round Table

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"Getting Back on Track – Practical Steps towards 2063"

Kigali Rwanda May 11 2022

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Communiqué

The 14th eLearning Africa Ministerial Round Table took place in Kigali, Rwanda on May 11th, 2022. Participants, who included Ministers and senior government officials from 15 African nations met in person for the first time since the global Covid-19 pandemic. Presentations by government Ministers, UNESCO, ADEA, and global EdTech businesses, discussed the challenges faced by leaders, and by education practitioners, in ensuring that African education meets the challenges and opportunities of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), the demographic 'youth bulge' and the targets of Africa 2063.

The Covid-19 pandemic hit education in Africa hard, with students in some countries missing up to a full academic year because of school closures. At the same time, the development and implementation of ICT supported learning during the pandemic saw important innovation in education provision in some countries. However, ICT supported learning mostly benefitted the better-off students, primarily in urban centres. Those students in rural areas, with less financial resources, and/or unaffordable connectivity to the internet fell further behind. Many children, particularly girls, have not yet returned to school since the pandemic school closures.

Discussion during the Ministerial Round Table focused on both of these areas: ensuring that no-one is left behind, and, at the same time, moving forward with the opportunities offered by integration of ICT enabled learning into school, college and university curricula. Linked to both of these was a focus upon ensuring education provided flexible (21st century) skills, as well as job-specific skills to meet the needs of national and continent-wide economic priorities.

For Africa to benefit from the opportunities offered by the 4IR, and the (potential) demographic dividend of a very young population, there was broad agreement that ICT needs to be fully integrated into the education delivery system, with the appropriate infrastructure. But, as Karam Zaitoun of Cypher Learning, noted, quality in education has a price.

At the same time, an immediate priority is to combat inequalities in education by getting students, particularly girls, back into schools and learning. An UNESCO initiative proposes using ICT in education particularly to:

1. Help the most marginalised
2. Expand investment in free, high quality digital content
3. Boost pedagogic innovation and change for digital spaces

While it was understood that this approach was very important in 'leaving no-one behind', it was also understood that the current model of education does not yet provide for this approach. While any investment in education is clearly cost-effective, limited budgets force governments to prioritise investments in education. Different countries face different challenges, and therefore have different priorities. In countries where enrolment and retention at the primary level remains an issue, this is what will be prioritised. In countries where universal primary completion is already achieved, then priorities might lie at the secondary, TVET and tertiary levels. However, the three principles of ensuring all have access to digital education, that appropriate digital materials are available, and that teachers have the competence and confidence to use them remain relevant for all. Mayank Dhingra from Hewlett Packard focused on the need for teachers to attain digital fluency and a resilient mind-set.

The Ministerial Round Table discussed issues around 'transition', and the loss of students between primary and secondary, and between secondary and TVET or tertiary education. It was noted that students, provided they have basic digital literacy skills, after leaving school can use these skills to learn practical job skills online. Schooling, even at primary level, should leave students with the literacy, digital literacy, and numeric skills to either be able enter employment straight away, or to learn the appropriate skills for employment through online learning offers as part of a lifelong learning path.

Another theme of the Ministerial Round Table was the need for education systems to be demand driven, and flexible and adaptable enough to meet changing needs from economic priorities, technical innovation, and student learning priorities. In other words, the model of education needs to adapt from a 'one size fits all' national curriculum, to curricula that meet the economic needs of a country or region. Furthermore, post-primary education should place greater focus on the development of job-related skills. An example from Uganda given at the Round Table was an agricultural project-based learning by secondary students, who used maths, science and engineering in a practical way, e.g. to grow, manage and sell an agricultural crop.

Another example of practical job-related learning is in the area of ICT itself. It is a growing skills market, increasingly central to all aspects of life. The need for programmers and other ICT specialists will continue to grow for the foreseeable future. Mike Damiano, from Coursera for Campus, noted that ICT is an area where you can learn skills online, remotely, and can then do an ICT related job, again remotely. Africa will have an increasing need for ICT professionals over the coming decades, and developing skills in this area now should be prioritised now, and will have a very beneficial effect on the continent's development over the coming decades.

Africa's current population is estimated to be about 1.4bn. By 2050, it is estimated it will be about 2.5bn. with over half of this population under 20 years old. Or, to put it another way, the equivalent of almost the entire current population of Africa will be seeking education by 2050.

The current model of education will not be able to cope with these numbers. The African Union, and individual African countries, will need to begin to plan how they will address this issue now. This huge number of young people will all expect access to quality education, relevant to their particular circumstances. The economic opportunity provided by this demographic resource will only be fully realised if talent is given the opportunity to access and benefit from quality education. Appropriate ICT enhanced education will need to become integral to the whole education system, and sooner than current thinking is allowing. Africa has ample human resources. Thinking needs to change from wondering how the current system will cope with the huge increase in demand over the next 30 years, to begin building an ICT integrated education system that will be able to handle the demand, and lead to productive educational and economic outputs for all students.

General recommendations

Participants at the Ministerial Round Table made a number of general recommendations:

1. Rethink the desired outcomes, delivery systems, quality and access to ensure all African youth will be able to access relevant, quality education in 2050, and develop a plan to do so.

2. Make teachers and officials at all levels of the education system 'digitally literate' and able to access ICT enabled learning for themselves and their students.

3. Integrate ICT enabled learning into all stages of the education delivery chain.

4. Prioritise affordable access to connectivity in all parts of the country, and make it available to all members of all communities.

5. More immediately, promote the development of practical ICT skills, enable young Africans to work in the field for international companies while remaining at home, and build up the ICT expertise within the continent

Session 1: African Leaders' Challenges and Opportunities in Education for a Transformed Continent

The Ministerial Round Tables' opening session focused on the challenge for African leaders, as they put education at the forefront of plans to create a 'transformed continent.' Participants discussed on what they can do to set the direction and create an 'enabling environment' within which the benefits of world class education will spread across Africa. Panellists from UNESCO and Coursera joined Rwanda's Minister of Education for a wide-ranging discussion of issues including opportunity, leadership, connectivity and human resources.

Chairperson:

*   **Joseph Nsengimana,** Director of the Mastercard Foundation's Centre for Innovative Teaching and Learning in ICT, Rwanda

Panellists:

*   **Hon Claudette Irere,** Minister of State in charge of ICT and TVET, Ministry of Education, Rwanda
    Opening Remarks

*   **Mark West,** Education Specialist, UNESCO
    Overview principles and commitments in the newly launched Rewired Global Declaration on Connectivity for Education

*   **Mike Damiano,** Director National Education Initiatives, Coursera for Campus, UK
    How can the post-pandemic world of remote learning and remote work accelerate Africa towards Agenda 2063?

Session 2: Putting Future Education and Learning Professionals at the Heart of Economic Growth

The Ministerial Round Tables' second session examined the new role of teachers and other learning professionals. This panel explored how Africa can embrace change and put the teachers and learning professionals of the future at the heart of education, training and economic growth. Participants heard from the Association for the Development of Education in Africa about how teaching and learning can be re-imagined in the post-Covid era. The session looked at how HP IDEA is already helping teachers master their new reality in 10 countries throughout Africa. And, as they consider how education, training and technology can be an instrument for economic growth, participants heard from Cypher Learning, about its 'Plan, Implement and Evaluate' model.

Chairperson:

• **Dr Harold Elletson,** Editor the eLearning Africa Report, UK

Panellists:

• **Albert Nsengiyumva,** Executive Secretary, ADEA - Association for the Development of Education in Africa, Côte d'ivoire
Building Back Better: Re-imagining teaching and learning in Post COVID-19 Era

• **Mayank Dhingra,** Senior Education Business Leader – EMEA, HP, UAE
Teacher Resilience and Digital Empowerment

• **Karam Zaitoun,** EdTech Specialist, Cypher Learning, Jordan
Plan, Implement and Evaluate - Moving beyond the pandemic