

**Keynote Address by the
Hon. Beth Mugo, Kenya's Assistant
Minister for Education, Science and Technology
on the occasion of the Pan-Africa conference on eLearning held in Addis Ababa
May 24 – May 27, 2006**

Director of Ceremonies
Honourable Ministers
Members of the Diplomatic Community
Representatives of Governmental and Non-Governmental Organisations
Representatives of International Development Agencies
Distinguished Delegates
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is indeed a privilege and honour for me to be invited to deliver this keynote speech at this historic event of the Pan-African E-Learning Conference, the first of its kind in Africa. The Government of Kenya, and indeed the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology is pleased that Kenya has been given the opportunity to be part of this historic moment.

We would like to thank the Ethiopian Government and the organizers of the event, ICWE of Berlin, for accepting the challenge to bring all of us from Africa and beyond together.

Director of Ceremonies, Ladies and Gentlemen: This workshop is historic for several reasons. For many years, we have seen the rapid developments in the use of ICTs. This has, in turn, led to many exciting and often challenging applications in the fields of telecommunications, health, business, and space exploration to name but a few. One of the most exciting applications of ICTs, which can be said to be closer to the theme of this workshop, is in the field of Education.

We see this assembly as a major landmark in African education because it's the first of its kind on the Continent, bringing together world experts to share their experiences in e-learning with Africans. We hope those present will take the opportunity to share and learn from these experiences.

Ladies and Gentlemen: In Kenya we have put in place policies geared towards support of ICTs in schools to support learning and teaching. The Kenyan government have published Sessional Paper No. 1 of 2005 as a policy blueprint. In the Kenya Education Sector Support Programme (KESSP), we have laid it out clearly and have made provisional budget lines to support e-learning. We recognize that e-learning will be necessary if we are to satisfy the ever-growing demand for education without always building new classroom walls.

Through Sessional Paper number 1 of 2005, the Kenyan government have resolved to promote open and distance learning at the primary and tertiary levels. We recognize that e-learning is the key if this is to be done on a large scale. We would also like to see the needs of Technical, Industrial, Vocational and Entrepreneurship Training (TIVET) addressed through e-learning. I have to caution that although this is so, the realities of our

environment have not made it possible to reach all. A lot of study and research still needs to be done to understand our environment properly. It is for this reason that we fully support this workshop. We see it as a major capacity- building event for Africa.

Director of Ceremonies, Ladies and Gentlemen, allow me to expound on the Kenya Education Sector Support Program (KESSP). The KESSP is based on the rationale of the overall policy goal of achieving Education for All (EFA) and the Government's commitment to the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG). KESSP was developed as part of the Sector-Wide Approach (SWAP) in conjunction with development partners.

The KESSP comprises twenty-three investment programmes focusing on the education sector as a whole. The KESSP fits within the broader framework of national policy framework as set out in the Economic Recovery Strategy (ERS) and Sessional Paper No. 1 of 2005 on a Policy Framework for Education, Training and Research.

Within KESSP, e-learning is identified in the following Investment Programmes areas:

1. Primary Teacher In-service Teacher Training

An action research and pilot programme is to be initiated to explore the possibility of in-servicing pre-service teacher trainers through e-learning methodologies. The government is currently in the process of acquiring consultants to assist in this field. It is expected that the research will help formulate a five-year strategy to develop an e-learning policy and adequate content to be piloted in year 2006/2007.

2. ICT Investment Programme

The e-Government strategy and national ICT policy give considerable attention to e-education, and the KESSP ICT Investment Programme intends to put in place the policy and strategy for ICT in education; to foster development of e-learning delivery systems; to build the necessary capacity; and to promote development of required ICT infrastructure and institutional management systems. The government and partners are already addressing this investment programme. A draft ICT Strategy for education is currently in circulation among stakeholders and will be ratified soon.

In response to the KESSP Investment Programme, several development partners such as USAID and DFID have stepped forward to support implementation of the ICT component. USAID has helped the government to prioritize its options by commissioning an "ICT in Education Options Paper". This paper discusses ways in which information and communications technologies can be leveraged to support and improve the delivery of quality education for all Kenyans. The development of local e-content for Kenyan education system is emphasized; however, we recognize that e-content development is a long-term investment that requires planned capacity building and coordination.

Ladies and Gentlemen: In choosing e-learning platforms, we, as a country, are not shy to consider of open source platforms where appropriate. The use of open source is clearly stated in our e-government strategy.

My Ministry is concerned with a trained human resource pool and experienced developers of instructional content, so that as we expand, there will be an adequate resource base to draw on. This is why we value a gathering such as this, which we see as important in capacity building.

Ladies and Gentlemen: Let me now turn to Africa. Although we may have good strategies and investment programmes, the Continent is still behind. This is not by choice but rather due to, among other considerations, resource and capacity constraints. We are all at different levels of development, and many of us are still faced with difficulties in finding requisite funds to purchase computers, install Internet, purchase relevant educational software, develop content, and - most critically - to train teachers in the application of ICTs in our classrooms. This is compounded by a lack of information on what is happening in other parts of the Continent and the world at large.

Ladies and Gentlemen: These challenges bring me to another point; namely, that we need to seek partnership with our brothers and sisters in other parts of the world. The European Commission, for example, are at the moment finalizing the 7th Framework Programme for 2007. This Framework offers an excellent opportunity for collaborative R&D in areas such as e-learning with EU funding. As we all know, Africa's universities do not yet possess high-level skills in R&D, and where skills exist, adequate funds are not available

This Pan-African Conference is indeed an opportunity that should be exploited to expound on strategies for overcoming challenges facing Africa. It is my hope that its deliberations will give guidance to us as Ministers of Education and Policy Makers.

I would like to commend the Ethiopian Government for hosting this important event; it is certainly opportune that the first such Pan-African conference should be held here at AU headquarters. I would also like to thank all government representatives from across Africa, International Development Partners, Inter-Governmental Organisations, and the other crucial organizations and individuals who have made this event happen.

Director of Ceremonies, Ladies and Gentlemen: In this regard, allow me to commend the efforts of ICWE for its hard work in organizing this conference. As you know, 2007 is just around the corner, and we as a government are in the process of finalizing negotiation to host the 2007 event in Nairobi. We look forward to seeing you all there.

With this I would like to thank you for listening. I eagerly look forward to reading the report from this workshop.

Asante! Thank you.