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Is Computer Learning Becoming Redundant in Africa?

Teachers and technologists gathering at the eLearning Africa 2010 conference in Zambia will be debating a billion dollar question, attempting to work out whether future African students will learn from the telephones in their pockets or from the laptops in their classrooms.

The African continent stunned the world by leapfrogging several stages of traditional telecommunications development and a third of all African citizens are now mobile phone subscribers. Some debaters at eLearning Africa 2010 will argue that the existence of these millions of mobile phones means it may no longer be cost-effective to use scarce resources to install laptop and desktop computers in schools.

Despite some huge investments in Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in most African states, the millions of mobile telephones now in private hands may provide the best gateway to learning for the school children, students, apprentices and technicians of the new Africa.

For the last five years eLearning Africa has spread technology-enhanced learning and training throughout the continent and demonstrated best practice examples of eLearning and technology-enhanced learning.

International organisations including the African Virtual University, the World Bank Institute and the United Nations Environment Programme are to join grassroots non-governmental organisations to enrich the conference programme with presentations about the work of battling illiteracy in Southern Africa, promoting gender equality in Mali and encouraging participatory communication in East African refugee camps.

After a successful political discussion on eLearning in post-conflict situations at last year's Senegal conference, the role of ICT in building a peaceful and stable society is to be discussed in Lusaka this year.

The eLearning Africa Debate will be held at the 2010 conference in Lusaka, Zambia, between 26 and 28 May. The concepts of "eWaste management", "eInclusion", "eHealth" and "Green IT" are high on the agenda.

eLearning Africa is "the largest pan-African conference on ICTs for education and training, a key networking event for investors, experts in education and providers of education and training in Africa," according to organisers.

The conference is accompanied by an exhibition and demonstration area where leading international eLearning manufacturers, suppliers and service providers present their latest products and services. More than 1,500 education professionals from around the world are expected at this year's eLearning Africa.