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New ICT growth strategy targets Africa's education

By ORTON KIISHWEKO

FOCUS has now shifted on secondary and university education systems in Africa as the continent's labour markets face threat of experiencing a shortage of competent workers in the age of Information, Communication and Technology (ICT), the 6th e-Learning Africa Conference heard yesterday.

Participants at the three-day international conference in Dar es Salaam, noted that there is likely to be a "disconnection in what the education institutions teach and the skills employers need," if ICT will not be fully integrated from primary and secondary to university level education.

Presenting a paper titled "Promotion of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) under the ECOWAS e-Learning Initiative", the Principal Education Programme Officer for ECOWAS, Ms Rachel Ogbe, said employers need graduates who emerge from education systems that have armed them with skills to handle fast-paced industries.

She observed that surveys have shown that most teachers have phobia for ICT and it is not possible for students to come out fully-baked if teachers are not skilled.

"The role of employers is very strategic and as teachers, we have to train so that we can be able to sell in their market," she told the conference.

She said the survey has further shown that there were professors who did not want to be bothered with ICT stuff on grounds that they were soon retiring.

"The general global trend

today is towards ICT skills-based education that will provide better outcome in practical skills, values and attitudes," she pointed out.

She raised concern that all over Africa, millions of young people leave primary and secondary school without any practical or employable skills to enter the labour market.

The 6th e-Learning Africa Conference Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) for Development, Education and Training also recognized that there would be a notable disconnection if ICT is not well integrated in education systems and asked that students should be empowered with the ability to make a seamless transition into the work force from higher learning institutions.

In his presentation, Prof John Simiyu from Kenya's Chepkoilel University College of Moi University titled 'Activities to strengthen skills and employability through the integration of ICT and e-learning,' said that employability of students would also be scaled up through merging ICT and technical and vocational education and training in a term known as TVET.

He said ICT is most impactful thing for people to improve employability, though the question, he noted, was what specific ICT related skills are necessary for being better at a job.

The academician's views were also shared by Swaziland's Chief Inspector for Tertiary Education, Mr Peterson Dlamini, who said that there were also having increasing numbers of young graduates from the few tertiary institutions who can not be absorbed by the job market.