

Questions & Answers

1. What is eLearning Africa?

eLearning Africa is a pan-African conference that focuses on Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in Development, Education and Training. It is an annual event which is organised by ICWE in cooperation with education and infrastructure ministries in the respective countries.

2. What are the main aims of the eLearning Africa conferences?

Creating a collaborative and sustainable network for technology-supported learning experts on the Continent – this is one of the key challenges of eLearning Africa. Taking place each year in a different country, the conference aims at establishing and linking decision-makers from governments and administrations with universities, schools, governmental and private training providers, industry and important partners in development cooperation.

There are many ICT initiatives underway in Africa as well as in other developing countries all over the world. Many face similar problems and are working on finding solutions. By bringing these initiatives together, the exchange of experiences and networking can be enhanced. This creates synergies and helps to avoid “reinventing” the wheel.

Furthermore, the conference brings eLearning activists from different sectors and backgrounds together. Partnerships between the public and the private sector are created, new initiatives are born and people enhance their professional networks.

For the hosting countries, the conference offers unequalled opportunities to raise awareness of the educational potential of ICTs amongst political decision-makers, education practitioners and learning providers. The conference marks the culmination of a national campaign to promote its ICT in education policy.

3. Which concept is behind it?

Recognising the many links and cooperation efforts between African and development organisations, eLA seeks to augment these by fostering networking among Africans, thus helping to create synergies for self-development.

eLA provides a significant piece of infrastructure for an “all-African agenda” to meet the needs and challenges for ICT implementation in education by bringing education practitioners, administrators and business decision-makers together at one table.

eLA proactively seeks the cooperation of African governments that are willing and capable of supporting the event, for example by acting as a hosting country. Furthermore, we cooperate with a considerable number of development agencies, international organisations and educational foundations, all involved in one way or another with eLearning Africa. eLA is constantly building up its network to support the event and to ensure sustainability.

4. Who are the target groups?

eLA delegates are high-level decision-makers from governments as well as practitioners from education and business sectors. They come from governments and government agencies, global players in the education industry as well as from SMEs; from schools, universities, scientific and higher education institutions as well as from associations and organisations in the field of development and education.

Although the majority of participants in 2006 and 2007 were able to attend the event at their own expense, eLA continues its successful strategy of donor-sponsored participation for African delegates, thus ensuring an equitable balance among members of the conference audience, as the financial capacities of African countries themselves are hugely diverse.

5. What has been achieved so far, and what impact does the conference have?

On March 4, 2008, an e-mail questionnaire was sent to the 2238 people who had participated in eLearning Africa in 2006 and 2007. They were requested to give feedback on how the conference has impacted their projects, their organisations or their professional careers.

The sectoral composition of participants comprised stakeholders from all key areas connected with eLearning in Africa. The expert assemblage included individuals from education at various levels, business and industry, governmental agencies and NGOs, as well as other members of civil society.

Half of the respondents indicated that their conference participation had directly resulted in a new project, some type of cooperative endeavour or a direct career enhancement. A total of 78 percent reported that they had been able to extend their network significantly. Of the people who have responded so far, 94 percent expressed interest in attending another eLearning Africa event.

It can be said that eLearning Africa has a broad impact on the ICT for Development and ICT for Education movement on the Continent. For further reference stories, please go to www.elearning-africa.com/newsportal.

6. Why is eLearning important for Africa?

We see eLearning as a key methodology and service framework for developing countries because of the scalability of educational technology-based services, the permanence of digitalised contents, the asynchronous delivery mode and the ubiquitous availability once systems are set up and maintained.

Through learning applications, all interactions between learner and teacher as well as learner and learner are documented instantly and continuously. Performance becomes transparent, allowing for a high degree of quality control and supervision.

The introduction of ICT-based learning services in the African context can achieve the following:

- Provide accessibility to and outreach of education and training to rural and remote regions
- Provide training opportunities on a large-scale
- Provide up-to-date training materials that can easily be locally developed, shared, altered and re-used
- Foster distributed expert communities

We see eLearning as a development accelerator needed in many countries in order to achieve the Millennium Development Goal of “Education for All”. While eLearning in the developed countries is often seen as a nice-to-have, for Africa and equally for other developing countries, it poses the only opportunity to get connected to the Information age.

7. Are there any local, cultural or infrastructure issues in bringing technology-supported education to Africa?

Lack of broadband Internet infrastructure is an issue in many African countries that often poses obstacles to online education. At the same time, mobile coverage is widespread and offers opportunities to deliver learning and information to the people. Also television and community radios can be seen as important learning facilitators.

8. Who is spearheading eLearning in Africa?

There is currently no reliable data available that allows a fair comparison of individual countries. In 2007, infoDev released a summary report on ICT in Education initiatives in 53 African countries. The data, drawn from a quick survey process conducted in 2007, can be regarded as illustrative rather than exhaustive. The report provides “snapshots”, as ICT initiatives are “at a particularly dynamic stage in Africa; new developments and announcements are happening on a daily basis somewhere on the continent”, as the report



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states. The data can be accessed online at
www.infodev.org/en/Publication.354.html.

eLearning Africa, in cooperation with Tim Unwin, UNESCO Chair in ICT4D and Professor of Geography at the Royal Holloway, University of London and SPIDER, the Swedish Program for ICT in Developing Regions, recently released a survey on eLearning in Africa. This report summarises information about the status of e-learning in Africa based on responses to a questionnaire circulated in 2007 to people on the eLearning Africa database. Respondents to the survey were from 42 different African countries, with Kenya (15%), South Africa (12%), Nigeria (11%), Ethiopia (9%) and Uganda (8%) furnishing most respondents. The report can be accessed online at
www.elearning-africa.com/publications_surveys.php.

Hard copies will be available in the eLearning Africa press secretariat.

Notes for editors

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