



13th Ministerial Round Table



“The 2021 Virtual Edition”

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online



Communiqué

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Communiqué

The 13th eLearning Africa Ministerial Round Table was held online on November 3, 2021 in partnership with Coursera for Campus. Ministers and officials from countries including Zimbabwe, Mauritius, Namibia, Egypt, Mauritania, Rwanda, Madagascar, Lesotho, Malawi, South Africa, Eritrea and Benin joined experts from around the world for a discussion about the role of higher education in transforming Africa through skills development. The event was made possible with the generous support of Coursera. .

Keynote speakers were:

- **Professor Islam Abou el-Magd**, Counselor for the Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research, Vice-President of NARSS, Professor of Remote Sensing and The Environment Secretary General of the Space Council of Egypt and Vice-President of AARSE - African Association of Remote Sensing and Environment, Egypt
- **Dr Abdul-Hakeem Ajijola**, Chair, African Union Cybersecurity Expert Group, Nigeria
- **Dr Samar Farah**, Skills Transformation Consultant, Coursera for Campus, EMEA
- **Mike Damiano**, Director - National Education Initiatives, UK
- **Maximilian Bankole Jarrett**, Africa Programme Manager, International Energy Agency, France

The title of the roundtable was 'Using Skills-Based Online and Blended Learning to Put Higher Education at the Heart of Your Plan for Economic Growth' and it took place against the background of the coronavirus pandemic, which has slowed global economic growth and brought some economies to a virtual standstill. At the same time, however, participants noted that in many ways, the pandemic has also ushered in a new era of change: education has been transformed and a new age of opportunity has begun.

One keynote speaker, Professor Islam Abou el-Magd of Egypt, summed up this view of the pandemic as not simply a challenge, but an opportunity for education.

"The learning lesson of this exercise is that we have the resources, we have the brains, and we have the good will as well," he said. "So, why don't we think out of the box and improve our education, science and technology



ecosystems to fill the gaps and boost our economy. I believe that this round table is touching the nerve and thinking ahead of this issue.”

Whilst it is now widely accepted that modern students, academics and employers increasingly appreciate the benefits of online learning for knowledge transfer and the acquisition of key skills, a key practical question facing many countries is how technology and the use of more blended learning can enable higher education to play a leading role in transforming their economic prospects. An important aspect of this is how to use technology effectively to help a new generation of learners acquire the skills they’ll need to build a thriving economy. It was in this context that speakers and participants at the Ministerial Round Table focussed their attention on the prospects, perspectives and plans for using online and blended learning to increase the capacity of Africa’s higher education sector to contribute to economic growth.

There was general agreement among participants that:

- Investment in skills development is closely connected with economic growth, increased wages and greater social equity
- There is a strong connection between skills development and innovation and competitiveness
- If African countries are to compete effectively in the global markets of the twenty-first century, they urgently need to transform the skills base of their populations - and of young people, in particular
- Africa has the youngest population of any continent in the world, which is a reason for considerable optimism, but an unacceptably high number of young adults are currently in neither employment, education or training (one speaker, Dr Samah Farah, estimated this number amounted to 30% of young adults)
- Africa’s population will continue to increase rapidly (one speaker, Maximilian Bankole Jarrett, estimated that the populations of 26 African countries will at least double in size between 2017 and 2050, making one in four people on earth African)
- Whilst most African countries are still overwhelmingly rural and agricultural, the population will become increasingly urban
- Most new jobs will be created in the digital space, in areas such as cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, data analysis, cloud computing and software development
- Africa’s cybersecurity market will continue to grow and is likely to be worth \$30 billion within 10 years
- Improving access to work in IT and cybersecurity for women and marginalised groups must be a priority
- The UN’s 2030 goals for sustainable development will only be achieved if they are achieved in Africa



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Digital Transformation & Upskilling

Educational staff and leaders are central to any successful educational initiative. Investing in their skills to drive transformation and innovation will determine the impact on the broader education system.

- Human capital is the region's most important resource. How this capital is protected, nurtured, enhanced and enabled will determine our future.
- Unlocking the potential of Africa's human capital is substantially dependent on technology. The technological industries of the future depend on investment in technology assisted learning now.
- Technological proficiency will increasingly be required across the workspace: not just in the emerging 'tech' sector, but also in 'traditional' industries, such as agriculture, health care, tourism and education.

Participants also agreed that the creation of the ACFTA, a single African market, particularly in the digital sphere, was likely to have a significant beneficial effect on the prospects for future economic growth and the chances of achieving the African Union's 2063 Vision of a 'transformed continent.' There was general acceptance among participants of the African Union's 'aspirations for the Africa we want,' and an understanding of the importance of education in achieving them.

The question now is how to turn aspiration into achievement and vision into reality.

Dr Samara Farah and Mike Damiano from Coursera, one of the world's leading online learning platforms, which partners with governments on initiatives to provide access to education, improved student employability and digital transformation, showed that African learners are already using online learning to develop a broad range of foundational skills. Africa is showing the largest growth globally in online learners on the Coursera platform.

The priorities for African countries now are to:

- identify what exactly the skills are that are important for individual populations
- understand how labour markets are likely to develop
- increase access and opportunity in IT for women and marginalised groups
- develop an appreciation of how the proficiency and existing skills sets of populations differ from our aspirations for the future
- understand the key universal skills for different pathways taken by tomorrow's young people, whether higher education, vocational education or even no post-secondary education
- focus on students' employability
- invest in key skills demanded by employers
- improve access, so that anyone with the internet can study and gain accreditations
- ensure effective benchmarking of progress in national education systems
- enhance continental cyber-defence and focus on creating jobs in cybersecurity and a home-grown cyber-solutions sector
- develop Africa-wide legal and regulatory cyber-security
- use an emphasis on cybersecurity to create trust in African platforms and the African digital economy
- be aware of the likelihood of a continuing increase in remote working, and not just remote learning
- help teachers and lecturers to acquire the vital industry 4.0 skills for digital pedagogy
- focus on power, innovation, equity, transformation, and partnership

For further reading:

[Women and Skills Report 2021 – Addressing Gender Gaps Through Online Learning](#)

[Evolving Higher Education – Unlocking Skills Development Through Online Learning](#)

[Coursera 2021 Global Skills Report – The world's top trending skills benchmarked across 100 countries](#)