“Youth, Innovation and the Development of Talent”

Communiqué

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Communiqué

The 8th eLearning Africa Ministerial Round Table (MRT) on “Youth, Innovation and the Development of Talent” was hosted by the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and co-organised by the African Union.

The MRT was attended by Ministers, Deputy Ministers and ministerial representatives from ministries of Basic and Higher Education; ICT; Science, Technology & Innovation; Youth & Sports; Development of the Digital Economy and Jobs; and Finance in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Egypt, Ethiopia, the Gambia, Guinea, Kenya, Liberia, Mali, Namibia, Rwanda, South Africa, South Sudan, Uganda, and Zimbabwe.

Speakers and observers also included representatives of leading private sector companies, development organisations and academic institutions. Both the African Union and the Ethiopian Government were particularly well represented. The Federal Republic of Germany was also represented by Chancellor Angela Merkel’s Personal Representative for Africa, Günter Nooke.

Drawing on the overall theme of eLearning Africa 2015, which is ‘Enriching Tomorrow,’ the main focus of discussion at the Ministerial Round Table was on the role ICTs can play in boosting innovation, nurturing talent and encouraging leadership. This is a vital issue if the African Union is to realise its 2063 Vision and become a ‘transformed continent.’

Many participants at the Round Table emphasised that, although several African economies are showing impressive annual growth rates and investment is flowing into many sectors, support for the education and training of young Africans is more vital than ever, if the continent is to make the most of the unprecedented opportunity to create sustainable long-term growth.

By 2050, 60 per cent of the African population will be under the age of 25 – a fact which suggests that, if it invests in youth, innovation and the development of talent, Africa could leapfrog its competitors. Developing the skills of young people, to enable them not only find employment but also to become job creators, is thus a central issue for both political and business leaders. Unsurprisingly, therefore, it was the ‘leitmotif’ for much of the discussion at the Round Table.

Debate at the Round Table took place in four separate sessions, each focussing on a particular theme and featuring both scene-setting keynote presentations and general discussion among the participants. After an opening plenary, sessions were held on ‘private sector perspectives’ and ‘best practice’ before a final session and the drafting of a communiqué.
In the opening session of the Ministerial Round Table, chaired by Dr Tesfaye Teshome, Director General of Ethiopia’s Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency, participants were given a comprehensive ‘tour d’horizon’ of some of the key issues affecting technology assisted education and training across Africa, and presentations focused mostly on youth in Africa, talent management, creativity and innovation.

Observations:
- The theme of the MRT was “crucial and timely”
- The MRT noted that, by 2050, close to 60% of the African population will be under the age of 25 years old
- If that segment of society is adequately skilled, it could catapult Africa’s development
- Africa is experiencing a ‘youth bulge’ and, with it, an increased labour force, which in itself provides opportunity
- The potential dividend from this labour force will not happen by itself; it requires targeted investment
- On the other hand, youth unemployment is at a record high
- Education strategies often fail to address the needs and expectations of the labour market
- ICTs should be used to further the autonomy and liberties of citizens, rather than to spy on them and control them

Recommendations:
1. Invest in youth
   - Young people are the creative part of society; we need to nurture their talent
   - There is a gap in technology-implementation and skill; ensuring young people acquire the right skills can help close the gap
   - Young people need jobs and, through skill development, they can be ready for employment or become job creators
2. How to invest in youth

- Invest in science and technology education, especially TVET, to enable youth to acquire skills and, most importantly, create a continental TVET strategy to address current challenges
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning through use of technology
- Adapt to use technology early in the education system, with the aim of improving overall quality at all levels
- Create linkages between higher and further education institutions and industry before students join the job market, in order to ensure they are able to identify their talents and access the right exposure and training to realise them
- Smart use of ICTs can be a direct benefit from the collaboration between Government and industry
- Encourage entrepreneurship, innovation and competition among young people, especially in the development of apps
- Support and promote business incubators, which are an important aspect for developing the talents of young people
- Build smart and strategic partnerships between the public and private sectors (PPPs) to support sustainable prosperity

The meeting was left with a number of questions on how we can reach these goals, and what politicians and decision-makers need to focus on. Ideas put forward included taking a sectoral approach, creating a digital-friendly environment, fostering digital and non-digital networks and open dialogue, losing the fear of transparency and regulating the ICT market whilst leaving room for innovation and entrepreneurship.

During the coffee break after the first session, participants toured the eLearning Africa exhibition, at which exhibitors showed a variety of new solutions and examples of best practice.
Session 2: Perspectives from the Private Sector

Chaired by Dr Maggy Beukes-Amiss, Director, Centre for eLearning and Interactive Multimedia, at the University of Namibia, participants considered the role of Africa’s private sector as an engine of growth, a creator of jobs, a provider of training and a developer of innovation and new solutions.

The main focus of the discussion was on how the private sector’s contribution to education and training could be expanded, as well as on the role of the private sector in influencing policy-making to support innovation and the development of talent. It also covered practical suggestions for addressing the disparity between theoretical training and the actual skills and competencies expected by employers.

Observations:
• There is a confrontational relationship between Government and industry
• We should reduce the numbers of committees and commissions, which result in limited quantifiable results; we need to act and stop overthinking our ideas
• We need to put in the required capacity and investment from the outset; otherwise, projects will fail
• How do we want to see the private sector, as a source of self-employment or a source of growth?
• Private sector institutions should focus on facilitating internship opportunities for University graduates
• We need to focus more on quality than quantity, whilst acknowledging the role GRNs play in investing in infrastructure and facilities
• We must ask ourselves, “how did the pool of educated unemployed emerge?”

Recommendations:
• Promote inter-sectoral discussion and cooperation: platforms like the MRT provide an opportunity to address the confrontational relationship (although, conflict can be healthy, depending on the approach to it)
• Focus on action and outcomes – particularly by ‘leveraging’ how these committees and commissions are used, as they are needed to validate outcomes of projects
• We need to be careful in how we contextualise innovation and bureaucracy, as unnecessary bureaucracy can stifle innovation
• We need to form smart partnerships/ PPPs fairly early
• We need to synchronise our programmes with the expectations of industry, which demands ongoing dialogue
• We need to support ‘born leaders’ and self-made women and men
Session 3: Best Practice Presentations

Chaired by Dr Aida Opoku-Mensah, the Special Adviser on the post-2015 Development Agenda at UNECA, this session focused on presentations sharing best practices in a number of key areas from various African countries.

Examples where given from Egypt, Rwanda, Liberia, Ethiopia and Kenya. Topics covered included best practices in capacity building that make use of massive training in collaboration with the private sector, and the importance of internships, attachments and partnerships with industry. Also highlighted was the recurring issue of the “skills gaps” of graduates and the fact that quantity often does not match up with quality. As Africa expands, we need to focus more on quality.

Individual presentations can be found here: www.elearning-africa.com/mrt_resources/2015

Session 4: Closing Plenary

In the final session of the Round Table, which was chaired by HE Getachew Negash, participants were given presentations on the 2015 eLearning Africa Report by its editor, Dr Harold Elletson, and the draft communique of the Ministerial Round Table, by Dr Maggy Beukes-Amiiss.

It was agreed that Ministers should be asked to assist with the preparation of ‘country reports’ in next year’s eLearning Africa Report – both in order to provide up-to-date statistics on eLearning readiness and to comment on the situation in their respective countries.