



9th Ministerial Round Table

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“Making Vision Reality:
Imagination, Innovation
and Implementation”

Cairo
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The 9th eLearning Africa Ministerial Round Table (MRT) on “Making Vision Reality: Imagination, Innovation and Implementation” was hosted by the Arab Republic of Egypt and supported by the German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development and Creative DC.



The MRT was attended by Ministers, Deputy Ministers and ministerial representatives from ministries of Basic and Higher Education; ICT; Finance; Science, Technology & Innovation; Youth & Sports; and Development of the Digital Economy and Jobs 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 African Development Bank were represented. The Federal Republic of Germany was represented by Chancellor Angela Merkel’s Personal Representative for Africa, Günter Nooke.

The meeting focused on the role of ICT-enhanced learning and training in transforming Africa and making the African Union’s 2063 Vision a reality.

The day was divided into four sessions, with the opening providing an inspirational foundation for subsequent panel discussions about the scope of technological innovation in education and the role of government in facilitating investment and innovation. The final session was dedicated to an open debate about the most important issues raised during the day.

Participants also exchanged examples of best practice in various sectors in their countries.



Session 1: Visions of the Future

In the opening session, chaired by Bhakta Prajesh, Country Programme Officer at the African Development Bank, participants were given an overview of the range of initiatives being planned or currently undertaken by both the African Union and individual countries. They also discussed future priorities.

Speakers:

- H.E. Yasser ElKady, Minister of Communication and Information Technologies, Egypt
- H.E. Mallam Adamu Adamu, Minister of Education, representing the Vice President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, His Excellency Prof. Yemi Osinbajo, Nigeria
- H.E. Dr Elham Ibrahim, Commissioner for Infrastructure and Energy, African Union Commission, Ethiopia

Observations:

- The session noted the key elements of the African Union’s 2063 Vision – particularly, the ‘7 aspirations’ which are:
 1. A prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development;
 2. An integrated continent, politically united, based on the ideals of Pan Africanism and the vision of Africa’s Renaissance;
 3. An Africa of good governance, respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law;
 4. A peaceful and secure Africa;
 5. An Africa with a strong cultural identity, common heritage, values and ethics;
 6. An Africa whose development is people-driven, relying on the potential of African people, especially its women and youth, and caring for children; and
 7. Africa as a strong, united, resilient and influential global player and partner
- Africa is one of the most successful continents in the world, in terms of its economic growth, which shows an average of 5% per annum.
- Africa is the world’s youngest continent, with a population of 200 million young people between the ages of 15 and 24. This represents both an enormous opportunity and a significant danger, if the challenge of change is not met.
- The development of both human capacity and ICT infrastructure development are crucial for Africa’s future.
- The main barrier is on our side – we have to transform our education system, which is the cornerstone of transformation but, in some countries, is itself in the midst of a process of transformation.
- We can use ICT as a tool to transform education.

Recommendations:

- We need to plan, motivate and mentor to achieve our aspirations.
- We cannot wait until 2063 – we do not have the luxury of time. We need to seize the opportunity to ‘leapfrog’ our competitors.
- We need to treat all children equally.
- We need to focus on teacher training with continuous training for both pre-service and in-service teachers.



- We need to ensure that there is an effective transition from a reliance purely on traditional learning, to a more widespread use of eLearning in the curriculum across Africa.
- We need to build a bridge between the skills gained through education and those likely to be demanded by the private sector and industry in the future.
- Key message: We need results.



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: Developments in Technology: Opportunities and Challenges for Education and Training

Chaired by Charles Senkondo, Executive Director of Tanzania Global Learning Agency (TaGLA), this panel discussion investigated the ways in which technology is affecting our culture of learning and working. Panellists shared their insights into what governments should already be anticipating and how they can prepare for change.

Speakers:

- Donald Clark, Plan B Learning
- Sean Carroll, Senior Director, Creative Associates International
- Prof. Moses Oketch, Professor of International Education Policy and Development, UCL Institute of Education
- Jessica Colaço, Co-Founder, iHub and Brave Venture Labs

Observations:

- Mobile phones may be a distraction. We have staked our hopes on better mobile phones solving our problems. This is the wrong focus – we should perhaps rather focus on better content: multi-lingual, Pan-African and cloud-based.
- We should look at things that can be implemented at scale. If you want scale, avoid attributing too much importance to policy: step aside and let things happen.
- Policies are important, but institutions can often slow things down and we need to move on.
- There needs to be a more obvious link between capacity building, content and policy implementation.



- There are vast opportunities for capacity development but we are confronted by a major impediment in implementation. This is a good time for Africa – youth, the overall economic situation, the rapid uptake of technology, especially mobile, are all positive indicators.
- Implementation is often undermined by systemic issues.
- Education systems are still from the colonial era, forcing us to adapt to ‘borrowed’ education systems – we need to change to catch up with current trends.
- Young people are bound to be disruptive and to make technology pervasive. We need to think about how can we embrace disruptive technology.
- There was a discussion about whether Africa needs its own common platform to champion education in Africa – or whether resources would be wasted on creating such a platform when free platforms and resources already exist globally. Would it not be better to focus on educational goals, serious political problems and a disaffected youth?
- Education is inherently connective. We must think about how we can break through our normative standards.
- There are three vital factors: quality, inclusivity and capabilities.
- People are focusing on different angles of learning from a peer perspective – peer learning will work in HE, but at primary level you still need teachers and instructors.
- More thought is needed about how we access big data, interpret it and share it.

Recommendations:

- We should move beyond devices – it is about learning outcomes, connectivity and content.
- We need to move forward and be more autonomous in terms of home-grown content.
- Good policy should be built around 16 year cycles rather than 5 year ones.
- We need to work together. People in the business space need to work with entrepreneurs. We cannot use copy/paste policies and methodology in Africa – we need peer to peer learning.
- We need people at a policy level to connect more with entrepreneurs. Events, such as eLearning Africa, are a valuable platform.
- Africa needs a more balanced approach to vocational education, rather than its current focus on university buildings and academia. Germany sets a good example that might be followed.
- We need to listen to our young people. This is vital because we have such a young population.
- More thought needs to be given to how we can embrace technology and use it to our advantage.
- We need to help young people and students to receive recognition for their skills and achievements. We must think carefully about how we can best qualify and certify their achievements.





- We need to challenge our current system, largely borrowed from the colonial era, and think about what is best suited to our future needs.
- We need to recognise Africa’s own developed platforms and replicate these, where appropriate.
- We need an innovative approach but there is no need to re-invent the wheel: sometimes, it can be costly to innovate and it may be better to use what is available globally.
- We need to overcome structural barriers, such as cultural norms, gender inequality and supply issues.
- We must change regulations to support innovation - and to recognise different business models.
- We must define outcomes, setting standards to support entrepreneurial and technological innovations, allowing them to thrive.
- We must ensure that our policies are relevant to local needs. We need to borrow what works and localise it to suit our environment.
- We need differentiated approaches to technology integration and use.
- There should be a focus on digital literacy and sectoral integration for capacity building. We must teach the skills for acquiring knowledge -teaching how to fish rather than providing the fish on a plate.
- We must encourage entrepreneurial learning at all levels.
- We need to look at how Virtual Reality (VR) will affect learning.
- Sharing is crucial. We need to learn through sharing – especially at policy level.

Session 3: Collaboration for Innovation and Investment

The second panel discussion, chaired by Dr Harold Elletson, Editor of the eLearning Africa Report, looked at how governments can collaborate with other stakeholders, in order to facilitate innovation and encourage investment. Panellists shared cases of successful partnerships and discussed the pros and cons of different approaches from around the world.

Speakers:

- Asmaa Hosny, CEO, Egyptian Information Technology Industry Development Agency
- Günter Nooke, Personal Representative of the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, for Africa, German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)
- Imraan Patel, Deputy Director-General: Socio-Economic Innovation Partnerships, South African Department of Science and Technology
- Toby Shapshak, Editor, Columnist & Strategist, Stuff Magazine
- Hesham Wahby, Co-Founder & CEO, Innoventures

Observations:

- More must be done to encourage a climate that favours innovation and inward investment.
- The Open University (UK) is an example of a government backed initiative that worked. It was mandated not just to provide teacher training, but to enable teachers to use technology to train themselves.
- One important role of government is to reduce risk.
- Competition is an important component of innovation.
- Opportunities exist not simply to build businesses to service the needs of the wealthy, but to identify the needs of the poor in Africa and to help to meet them.



- We need an enabling environment and governments want innovation. However, there is ‘an elephant in the room’ – the extent to which we are really ready for digitisation and change.
- You cannot teach entrepreneurialism in a classroom or university course, but only through experience. Governments can help by providing funding and support.
- For innovation to take place, a number of things need to happen: we need to incentivise, provide support – funding, incubators, building trust, tax incentives, clear rules and laws, appropriate infrastructure, inclusive policy making, a level playing field and a multi-faceted approach with the private sector.
- The government’s role is to focus on areas that are not, or not yet, commercially viable for private sector investment, rather than in areas where the private sector already operates, which discourages competition and investment.
- Innovation must be supported by clear objectives and collective goals.

Recommendations:

- Governments, both in Africa and outside it, need to focus on what they can do to encourage innovation and a better investment climate.
- Attention should be given to business models that can meet the needs of the poor and how to support them.
- Governments need to invest in affordable internet access for everyone, working in collaboration with the private sector.
- We need to create a level playing field for the development of open systems – with content that is device-independent.
- We must not neglect specialist parts of the education system – e.g. special needs schools.
- Governments need to focus on:
 - ◊ How they can create attractive incentives for innovators.
 - ◊ How they can support the set-up of techno-parks and foster innovative thinking.
 - ◊ Allowing innovation to happen and not conflict with existing systems.

“How can Africa unlock the potential of its young population to make the African Union’s vision reality? During the last two decades, we have seen how digital technologies can accelerate development and create new opportunities. Thus, I would like to make a recommendation: We have to empower and educate people to move their countries’ ITC sectors forward. And we should harness the potential of digital technologies to make equitable quality education accessible for all. Besides education, sector regulation, infrastructure and an open culture for digitalization at all levels are fundamental.”

Günter Nooke, Commissioner for Africa of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).





Session 4: Ministerial Panel

In the closing session, chaired by Dr Maggy Beukes-Amiss, Director of the Centre for Open, Distance and eLearning (CODEL) at the University of Namibia, a summary was provided from the previous sessions and ministers exchanged ideas and best practice examples of successfully implemented innovation and education policies in their various countries.



Observations/highlights from previous sessions:

- Governments need to ensure that the education of the future matches the needs of an increasingly globalised, digital economy.
- The question was raised: should governments dictate or try to create a climate which facilitates innovation and encourages investment?
- Pedagogy is key, not technology – it merely remains an enabler, a tool.
- We need a transformed education system as mentioned before.
- We need to focus on mobility, e.g. mobility of content/allowing access from anywhere etc.
- We need to focus on and address barriers of infrastructure, poverty and illiteracy.

Recommendations:

- Innovation and creativity go together with the ownership of the rights to a work: governments must provide robust protection for intellectual property.
- We must demystify scientific teaching by training young brains from the early stages in ICT.
- We need to streamline business processes while reducing bureaucratic processes.
- We need sustainable infrastructure and maintenance for Return on Investment.
- We need a critical mass of engineers and continuous focus on inclusive science education.
- We need to modify the delivery of information by embracing cloud-based solutions.
- We need to consider what happens after innovation – setting-up of techno-parks, incubation centres and the commercialisation of ideas.
- We need to open up borders in Africa in order to move innovative ideas from country to country

The 9th Ministerial Round Table provided participants, who included representatives of government, the private sector and education, with an opportunity to exchange views and take stock of the position of African countries as they set out on the road towards 2063. Whilst there were disagreements about some aspects of policy or best practice, there was a mood of optimism and a broad consensus about the essential measures that must be taken to ensure that education makes its contribution to a “transformed continent.”