10th Ministerial Round Table

"Meeting the Sustainable Development goals for Education – How eLearning and Digitalisation can support Inclusivity, Boost Training and Encourage Skills Development"

Republic of Mauritius
September 27
2017

Communiqué

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The 10ᵗʰ eLearning Africa Round Table took place in Balaclava, Mauritius on the 27th September 2017, ahead of the annual eLearning Africa conference, on the theme "Meeting the Sustainable Development Goals for Education - How eLearning and Digitalisation can Support Inclusivity, Boost Training and Encourage Skills Development."

The MRT was attended by ICT and Education Ministers from 17 African countries including Cameroon, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritius, Namibia, Senegal, Seychelles, South Africa, Togo, Uganda and Zimbabwe, together with representatives of leading companies and educational institutions.

Participants discussed the role of digitalisation in developing new skills in Africa and creating the basis for a competitive, modern workforce in the future. Digitalisation offers African governments the means to improve education and training in every sector and, most significantly, to boost economic prospects by helping to nurture a new generation of technology-driven entrepreneurs. The Round Table, therefore, looked in detail at some of the key issues affecting new entrepreneurship and the skills businesses will need in the future. The overall objective of the MRT was to analyse the new opportunities and encourage the development of workable plans and partnerships, which will contribute to the achievement of the UN's sustainable development goals for education.

The MRT was held under the Chatham House Rule and comments, ideas and proposals have not, therefore, been attributed in this report to individual participants. There were some significant disagreements between participants about both priorities and the most appropriate approaches to some of the problems facing African governments. These are reflected in both the discussion points and the recommendations below.

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Session 1: Creating Tomorrow's Jobs in Africa

The opening session, chaired by H.E. Kheswar Jankee, Ambassador to the Embassy of the Republic of Mauritius to Germany, was devoted to a discussion of some of the issues most likely to affect labour markets and job creation in Africa in the future. Participants recognised that education is, in many ways, the key to reducing unemployment and increasing competition in Africa. They were keen to examine how exactly ICTs could boost training and increase skills development to create jobs. They wanted to know how African countries could develop world-class entrepreneurial and tech-based education but, at the same time, there was some anxiety that education and training might not be able to make a difference if African labour markets and societies are not ready to make use of the new skills.

Speakers:

- Hon. Mr Yogida Sawmynaden, Minister of Technology, Communication and Innovation, Republic of Mauritius

- Hon. Mrs Leela Devi Dookun-Luchoomun, Minister of Education and Human Resources, Tertiary Education and Scientific Research, Republic of Mauritius

- Günter Nooke, Personal Representative of the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, for Africa, Federal Ministry forEconomic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), Germany

Observations:

- Whilst technology will create interesting opportunities for young people, there is a risk that jobs will be lost.

- A major challenge will be training young people for jobs that do not yet exist.

- Human resources are still very important and humans have not been replaced by robots.

- The right education and training leading to employment is essential.

- Digital literacy is essential for the 21st Century workforce.

- Mauritius has undertaken a programme of reforms to promote early exposure to ICT.

- In spite of the challenges of automation and digitisation, there is huge potential for the creation of millions of jobs.

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- New technologies will create opportunities for new ways of working, which may particularly benefit female entrepreneurs.

- Technology will make work more global and more freelance. It will increase the availability of online work and jobs around the world.

- Men are twice as likely as women to get jobs in the IT sector and, in many developing countries, large sections of the population, especially women, are denied access to the Internet.

- There is uncertainty about the nature of jobs that are likely to be available in the future.

- Business can, and should, help to ensure that curricula are contextualised and relevant to the needs of labour markets.

- Attention was drawn to the 'Africa Code Week,' which promotes coding skills among young people.

- The onus is on the state to invest in education.

- Access to the Internet remains an issue across much of Africa.

- Collaboration is an important 21st Century skill, as are problem solving, 'thinking outside the box' and adaptability.

- Mauritius has tried to promote access to technology at an early age by making 'tablets' available to grades 1 and 2.

- Connectivity is still very poor in many schools.

- Financial means should not be a barrier to education.

Recommendations:

- We need to re-skill a significant part of the working population.

- We need to support technology creators and innovators.

- ICT must be a major part of the modernisation of education and training systems.

- Industry must be involved with education in the design of courses, so that young people are adaptable and have the necessary 'soft skills' for the job markets of the future.

- Education should ensure that young people can solve problems, be creative and adapt to changing situations.

- We should do more to ensure that digitised resources are shared.

- Digital technologies must be included across all levels of education.

- Education resources must be both high quality and contextualised.

- We should support the development of knowledge societies.

- Integration of ICT skills should be done in a gender-sensitive way and female role models are needed in STEM / Core subjects.

- Emphasis should be on lifelong learning, adaptation and versatility as key aspects of future education.

- We need to promote an innovation-friendly environment and Governments should do more to create one.

- More attention needs to be paid to promoting access to education and employment for girls in a digital world.

- More needs to be done to ensure data security.

- There needs to be a focus on 'softer skills'.

- We need to focus on partnerships, rather than one country investing in a technology to be implemented elsewhere.

- Many governments find it difficult to monitor the involvement of different international partners and need help to work more effectively.

- We need to emphasise values and not just skills.

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- We need an 'Education fund' for the African continent.
- We must ensure access to technology at an early age.
- More needs to be done to improve connectivity in schools.
- We need more sophisticated digital tools and access to computer labs in secondary schools.
- We need an interactive platform for students for after-hours study and more support for online tutoring.
- Proper transport to schools should be organised.
- Exam fees should be paid by the state.
- More scholarships should be made available for vulnerable groups and disabled students to access tertiary education.
- We need to do more to overcome the barriers between different countries.
- We should share more research across Africa.
- Digitalisation is a new way of speaking to each other and we need to talk to each other more about our experiences and aims.

*During the coffee break participants enjoyed the beautiful Mauritian seafront
while taking the opportunity to network.*

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Session 2: Linking Education to Employment

In the second session, which was chaired by Dr Harold Elletson, Senior Fellow of the Institute for Statecraft and Editor of the eLearning Africa Report, participants considered the link between education and employment in what is likely to continue to be a rapidly changing world in which technology will continually re-shape markets. In this context, partipants considered the possible future development of both higher education and vocational training, whilst speculating about how technology-assisted learning might help to prepare Africa's workforce for the future.

Speakers:

- Salah-Edine Kandri, Global Head of Education, IFC World Bank Group, United Arab Emirates
- Ramesh Durbarry, Director General, Civil Service College, Republic of Mauritius
- Marc Desmarais, Head of Medine Education, Medine Ltd, Republic of Mauritius
- Hon. Minister Frank Tumwebaze, Minister of Information & Communications Technology, Uganda

Observations:

- Change is happening with increasing rapidity
- We do not know exactly what jobs will be needed in the future but we do know that employment is likely to be more flexible.
- There is a fundamental difference between education and training: education is flexible, training is more rigid and disciplined.
- Perhaps we need an approach that is based more on education and fundamental skills for the digital age, rather than more vocational training.
- Soft skills, such as collaboration, are vital.
- The private sector makes a huge contribution to education and this will continue.
- The whole world faces a serious skills mismatch.
- Literacy, numeracy and digital literacy are vital foundational skills.
- Regulatory changes, allowing more diversity in the delivery of education, have allowed countries, such as Brazil, to increase enrolment rates.
- Automation and artificial intelligence are irreversible.
- The need for skills is shifting drastically.
- The language of education is now shifting from talking about degrees to talking about skills.
- The job market is no longer related to domain-specific skills.
- Employers are increasingly looking for team work, emotional intelligence, adaptability and other soft skills.
- An important factor in the future will be the ability to learn, unlearn and relearn.
- Connectivity is creating new market spaces - e.g. Ukraine, India, the Philippines are all competing for the market in services. This is probably good for economic growth and job creation globally.
- African universities are not focusing sufficiently on African needs.
- Enrolment rates and the quality of service are declining in many countries.
- The range of courses offered at many universities is mostly traditional and there is a lack of focus on what we are actually preparing graduates to do.
- Many graduates are simply not ready to enter the world of work and there are few connections between education systems and employers.
- The future lies with the development of knowledge economies.

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- Companies, such as Medine Ltd of Mauritius, have begun to diversify from their traditional sugar-growing activities.
- Medine has invested in an 'education village' with an emphasis on bilingual learning, a variety of disciplines and professionalisation.
- Technology provides a platform for exchange and old methods are no longer suitable for our fast-paced world.
- Technology should not be seen as a panacea.

Recommendations:

- Governments need to create an enabling environment to facilitate learning and adaptation to change.
- Education systems should not keep students confined to one area or category.
- There should be more investment in early childhood development.
- Education and training need to be more closely related to the needs of the labour market.
- We need to think more about what learning is for and whether education is an end in itself or whether it is 'instrumental.'
- There needs to be a focus on soft skills, such as self-awareness, time management, global and commercial awareness, emotional intelligence, organisational skills and analysis.
- Only 28% of students in Africa are enrolled in the STEM subjects but there is a need for more technically qualified graduates. This needs to be given more attention.
- We need to increase access to STEM subjects.
- We need to create an environment in which educators and employers can meet regularly and discuss education reform.
- The result of these meetings should be integrated into new curricula.
- There should be more localised content.
- We need affordable and reliable broadband.
- Technology should complement existing traditional education.
- Connectivity and access are essential to bridge the digital divide.
- Education should be accessible to everyone and open-source.
- We should move away from an overly academic 'stream' to a more vocational one.
- We need more 'agile' abilities.
- Educational systems should make a commitment to social justice and peace, in order to make learners more humane.
- We need to focus on content, rather than just on technology.
- There must be a combination of soft skills and technical skills.

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Session 3 - Entrepreneurship in Africa

The third session, chaired by Dr Aida Opoku-Mensa, Special Advisor on Sustainable Development Goals, United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), Ethiopia, focussed on the creation and development of a new generation of African entrepreneurs. Whilst there have been many stories of successful new African entrepreneurs, little analysis has been done of their educational background and how they have been able to succeed. Participants considered how educational initiatives might lead to the creation of successful entrepreneurs. They also looked both at the role of technology and at how improvements in education might be matched by better funding for start-ups.

Panelist from Session 3 of the Ministerial Round Table discuss Entrepreneurship in Africa

Speakers:

- Hon. Mohamed Enver Surty, Deputy Minister of Basic Education, South Africa
- Ariam Mogos, Learning Lead, Office of Innovation, UNICEF, USA
- Dr Vanessa Gowreensunkar, Lecturer and Researcher, Mauritius Institute of Education, President, African Network for Policy, Research, and Advocacy for Sustainability, Secretary of African Union ECOSOCC, Woman and Gender Cluster, Republic of Mauritius

Observations:

- Innovative activities and practices can be described in many local languages, creating an 'African narrative' and raising awareness.
- There is currently a lot of criticism that Africa is not producing enough entrepreneurs and instead has been focussing on producing specialists, such as scientists.
- South Africa established a dedicated ministry for small and medium sized businesses, in order to promote entrepreneurship.
- South Africa also ensured Internet connectivity in all schools and made subjects, such as mathematics, compulsory.
- Many budding entrepreneurs do not derive their inspiration from their formal education but rather from informal learning.
- Being able to use a tablet does not necessarily imply the acquisition of digital literacy skills.
- Many African women face severe impediments in starting small and medium sized enterprises.

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- Social acceptance is still a problem for many female entrepreneurs.

- In South Africa, there is public recognition of female achievers by the state. There is also a gender commission, which looks into the interests and empowerment of women.

- Whilst accepting the realities of an increasingly globalised world, African countries also need to acknowledge the impact of colonisation on education systems.

- UNICEF is trying to map all schools in the world, in order to determine the effect of connectivity on inequity.

- Entrepreneurship does not necessarily require formal education to become established.

- An educational system should mirror the type of society that we want to develop.

- We should not just adopt technology as it is but, rather, evaluate its usefulness in relation to our local needs.

Recommendations:

- We need to empower young people to become entrepreneurs.

- The state must provide access to skills that are essential.

- The needs of learners and the wider population must be put first in all education projects and not the needs of private companies.

- We need to look at how to infuse the formal education system with inspiration from informal learning programmes and create a 'Youth Entrepreneurship Ecosystem.'

- The role of teachers needs to be redesigned towards student-led learning and problem-based learning, rather than subject-oriented learning.

- Digital literacy must operate within an interdisciplinary framework, with an emphasis on collaboration and solutions to problems.

- Digital literacy skills should take into account web and media literacy.

- There should be a focus on how to find, process and evaluate information from the Internet.

- There should be a greater emphasis on technical fluency, so that young people can use their skills to solve a problem, even if they are not familiar with a particular tool or resource.

- Education must be more project and skills-based.

- More must be done to enable women to start small and medium-sized businesses.

- Governments should remove barriers that prevent women obtaining finance for projects.

- Successful female entrepreneurs need to be recognised and used as role models.

- The role of the teacher as the 'provider of knowledge' needs to be changed, as students often have more knowledge than teachers.

- More should be done to address the economic consequences of migration, insecurity and the failure of institutions, all of which are detrimental to the the establishment of new businesses.

- Science and technology are important pillars of modern education and must be encouraged to play their part in attaining the SDGs.

- We must be careful to buy technology that we actually need and not simply agree to acquire what we are being sold.

- Local, customised programmes, relevant to our needs, must be developed in Africa.

- Companies that are genuinely interested in addressing social injustices should consider providing free internet access for e.g. schools and hospitals.

- ICT must be related to other subjects and taught in a holistic manner.

- Countries need to have a proper database of all schools, in order to have a clear overview of the education landscape.

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- More should be done to harness internal sources of finance and to use the African diaspora to fund some development projects.
- Ethics must be a guiding principle in the integration of ICT in education.
- Ethics, intercultural understanding and gender issues should be more present in the curriculum.
- In general, more needs to be done to create a better understanding between people.

The 10th Ministerial Round Table provided participants, including policy-makers, representatives of government, the private sector and education, the opportunity to share knowledge and exchange views on both the obstacles and success stories regarding education, employment and entrepreneurship throughout the different Africa countries represented.