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INNOVATING EDUCATION IN AFRICA EXPO

Meeting Continental Targets for Inclusive, Quality and Transformative Education and Training in the 21st Century

CONCEPT NOTE

1. Background and Context

Education and training remain among the bedrock of tools for human empowerment inclusive prosperity and progressive development. However, this powerful agency of education does not happen by chance. It has to be planned and strategized through adoption of innovation in education. Current demographic trends in Africa have seen expansion of education systems without necessarily having the concurrent enhancement of productivity and efficiency particularly with regards to improved outcomes in quality and equity in learning opportunities.

Appropriate platforms, frameworks and programmes and policies have to be developed and implemented to remedy this challenge. Innovative financing options have to be found. Education and training must be seen as everyone's business, and the government's debt of duty to its present and future citizens. Use must be made of every resource, indigenous, endogenous, international, new and emerging technologies to enhance the quality of education provision and learning outcomes. This must be done urgently in order that we achieve the goals we have set for ourselves in Agenda 2063 and SDGs, as unpacked in the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 16-25), whose mission is to "Reorient Africa's education and training systems to meet the knowledge, competencies, skills innovation and creativity required to nurture African core values and promote sustainable development at the national, sub-regional and continental levels." In this context, the African Union Commission, in cooperation with NEPAD and Business Africa has launched the continental dialogue platform "Africa Talks Jobs - Equipping the Youth with Adaptive Skills and Education for Employment and Entrepreneurship" in 2017.

Innovating Education in Africa is therefore at the centre of CESA's implementation as education should remain relevant in the face of rapid societal changes to which it needs to adapt. Indeed this urgency of innovation and its adaptation has been realised in some quarters among education dreamers and providers. Amazing cutting edge innovations on micro and relative large scale are being piloted and pre-scaled. Some have arisen out of sheer need and social economic challenge, while others have been more deliberate. Reports abound on successful use of e-learning platforms, from the humble mobile phone to sophisticated computers that are transforming the lives of many by providing opportunities of access to education at all levels, opportunities that had seemed beyond reach. This includes those who for social economic reasons could

not afford schooling, persons with disabilities for whom conventional education methods cannot suffice for their education, child mums who have to take care of their babies during regular learning hours, and other second chance learners who cannot stop work in order to attend school.

Innovations for promoting access include social innovations and strategies to rescue those who are denied opportunities, strategies to provide the support that poor parents need in order to release their children for school; strategies to broaden religious school curricula so that children acquire functional literacy and numeracy skills in the process…. The list goes on of interventions that enhance the convenience of accessing learning.

And it is not only concerning access that innovations are demonstrating potential. Areas of quality delivery and enhancing learning have been boosted through technological, social and fiscal innovations. Innovations for enhancing learning spaces in schools and campuses are engendering increased interest in education to achieve higher levels of retention and learning achievement. Innovative campuses have been designed for ensuring school safety with early warning systems.

Education systems should have ways of tracking progress toward any goal they set for themselves and their students. Concerns have also been raised on the quality of education that learners receive. The World Bank, in its report on "Learning to Realize Education's Promise" aver that struggling education systems lack one or more of four key school-level ingredients for learning: prepared learners, effective teaching, learning focused inputs, and the skilled management and governance that pulls them all together.[1] Many graduates present certificates declaring that they have successfully undertaken studies in STEM subjects such as physics and chemistry. However, many of them may never have seen scientific laboratory equipment due to challenges in learning inputs. Teachers are confirmed qualified and expected to make use of emerging technologies in teaching, when they may not have been exposed to such technologies during their training. Thousands of students from Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges across Africa have graduated with little or no practical training. The biggest challenge is the cost of teaching and learning materials, yet there are many innovations on school equipment, low cost teaching and learning materials, and mechanisms to optimizing use of limited resources through strategic sharing of such resources. It is therefore important that education systems encourage innovation and adaptation coupled with good evaluation measures and effective coalition of partners in learning as called for in CESA 16-25. It is only then that improvements from innovation can be widely diffused and herald a virtuous cycle of promising education and learning outcomes.

2.1 What Innovation Means for Education in Africa

i. Adapting to make impact

Our rapidly changing environment demands flexibility and a willingness to change. Staying relevant means being ready to adapt quickly, fundamentally and often. Schools and learners need to change in order to keep pace with new technologies.

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[1] World Bank. 2018. *World Development Report 2018: Learning to Realize Education's Promise.* Washington, DC

Preparing the education system in Africa to be agile enough to meet the fast paced world we live in is as equally important as encouraging them to adopt new technologies today. There is need for policies that offer room and guidelines to implement change when necessary.

Links with industry and the labour market in general promotes relevance and employability. Education and skills development need to be practice oriented and respond to the demands of the labour market as well as be able to equip for self-employment and entrepreneurship. There is need for mechanisms to ensure that the education system is well supported by stakeholders and beneficiaries.

ii. Collaboration for More Results

Accelerating change has become the pressing reason to reform our systems, structures and methods for learning and development. The most effective way to succeed is to work together. Partnerships, global classrooms, social networks, blockchain technologies and the combination of stakeholders from private and public sectors can all improve impact of education and decrease rising costs. There is need for better ways of encouraging and achieving dynamic cooperation.

iii. Redefining Learning Technology

There are many new 'learning solutions' which can improve delivery through the use of digital tools, apps and online services. The challenge includes creating an environment that stimulates this phenomenon called Edutech. Another challenge is to find ways in which learning professionals can integrate these technologies into their work. In Africa with low internet connectivity, there is need for ingenuity to harness the power of technologies and encourage adoption of these new initiatives that we aim to promote.

iv. Designing to Engage

Learning can be designed to capture attention and improve motivation, so that learners have more control over the learning process, giving them a deeper engagement with the subject. It is necessary to design rich learning environments and active learning strategies to improve participation in classrooms as well as informal learning settings. It also calls for methods, processes and tools that make learning more relevant and enjoyable; and redefining learning content to allow learners apply their knowledge better.

v. Enhancing New Skills Learning

Learners and teachers need certain skills in order to be mutually supportive players to the improved education ecosystem. Learners need to acquire skills that emphasise and promote leadership, entrepreneurship, diversity, creativity and information literacy. Teachers therefore need the right skills to impart such learning and development in their learners.

vi. Measuring Learning

Improving the learning process means being able to measure its impact on learners. Modules for tracking effectiveness are necessary in order to enable appropriate interventions to re-engineer what does not work and improve learning.

vii. Ensuring Inclusion

Education is a human right. It therefore necessary to develop or enhance mechanisms to reach those who might be excluded due to physical and mental disability, poverty, gender, refugee status and other social exclusion factors.

3. Purpose of the Event

In light of this context, the African Union Commission is working with several partner agencies across Africa to organize an occasion to showcase technical and social innovations in every area of education and training. The purpose is to establish a multisectoral platform for experience sharing on relevant innovations that address education challenges in Africa. The event is also aimed at raising the visibility of these innovative practices in order that they can be supported, up-scaled, replicated or further developed.

The event will include exhibitions, demonstrations, as well as presentation of technical papers on the subject, by academics, practitioners and policy makers.

The focus will be on the following:

i. Advocacy for education innovation and strengthened support to continental collaboration in innovation and adaptation.
ii. Engaging in the important debates and discussions on the full range of pressing education challenges with a diverse community of practitioners, policy makers, business sector and financiers committed to building strong prosperous and secure societies through leveraging on education innovation.

Specific Objectives

i. Provide a platform for education practitioners, policy makers, business sector and partners to exchange experiences, policies and challenges in enhancing education and learning outcomes through education innovation in Africa
ii. Identify, profile and showcase innovative education solutions across the continent for possible support including further development and replication
iii. Encourage and enhance research and innovation in education
iv. Encourage the involvement of the business sector in education and skills development
v. Propose a framework for development of strategies for innovation in education.

4. Participants

This is an important and valuable event that is expected to be attended by the following, among others:

- Government Ministers responsible for education, training, science and technology
- Senior government officials in education, workforce development and innovation spheres
- National and International agencies working in education related fields

- Practitioners
- Private Sector
- Civil Society
- Policy makers
- Inventors and social innovators
- Producers of school equipment

The organization of the event and the diversity of participants is expected to broaden the education debate, while focusing on critical opportunities and challenges around enhancing the competitiveness, productivity and efficiency of education through innovation.

5. Venue and Format of the Event:

The Innovating Education in Africa Expo shall be hosted by the Government of Senegal, Ministry for Higher Education and Research in Dakar, Senegal in October 2018.

Innovations will be identified through Calls for Submissions at local and international levels. The innovations must have demonstrated impact, with potential for wide dissemination. Innovations being sought for include both technical inventions and social innovations that are enhancing access, quality, relevance, school security, learning achievement, financing, employability, school management and so on. As is the tradition, a distinguished panel will assess the papers and the innovative education solutions to be presented at the event.

i.   Exhibition

The event shall have a diverse range of interactive, creative sessions offering participants numerous opportunities to share their work and achievements, and to network and collaborate.

Exhibitions will include documentation, software, hardware, video and audio clips and demonstrations.

ii.   Workshops and Conference

There will be a number of plenary sessions as well as breakout sessions that will feature presentations and discussions by prominent academics, policy makers, business actors and emerging education innovators, as well as representatives from development partner organizations.

Innovative approaches at all levels of education in employment oriented and entrepreneurship education and skills development with strong involvement of the African Business Sector will be showcased under the umbrella of 'Africa Talk Jobs' (ATJ) as a follow-up to the major ATJ conference that took place in 2017. A panel discussion will highlight the policy recommendations derived from the conference and discuss the way forward in bringing African youth into jobs through innovative education.

Papers accepted for presentation will be original work not previously published. Young African women and men researchers and innovators are especially encouraged to submit papers and share their work with as broad an audience as possible, with a view to expanding their networks.

6. Time frame for submission of papers and innovations:

Participants, experts and innovators submitting abstracts for the event must adhere to the key deadline dates as stated in the table below. Abstracts should not be more than 500 words and must succinctly articulate a single original idea, argument or policy recommendation.

Activity	Deadline
Call for proposals	9th May 2018
Deadline for paper submission	15th June 2018
Notification of final acceptance	30th July 2018
Closing of Flight Bookings	10th August 2018
Event Dates	4th-6th October 2018

5.2 Sponsorship

On submitting their papers, authors and innovators will be requested to indicate whether they require support to cover expenses (travel, accommodation and daily subsistence allowance) associated with their participation at the event. Only one author per paper and one person per innovation accepted for presentation will be eligible for support. Support is reserved for presenters, young researchers and education innovators from Africa. Young women are particularly encouraged to apply

6. Expected Outputs

The outputs of the Expo will include:

   i.   Expo Report: a summary of key findings and messages of key policy and developmental relevance distilled from conference papers, innovations and keynote speeches
   ii. Conference Proceedings: papers accepted for the conference will be published in the proceedings book and on African Union Website.
   iii. Education Innovators handbook: collection of the innovations that will be exhibited during the event, providing information on the innovators and their contacts
   iv. Formation of the Africa Education Innovators Network (AEIN)

Agencies interested in supporting education development in Africa are invited to participate as sponsors, as well as presenters. Send your offer and request to Dr. Beatrice Njenga, Head of Education Division - njengab@africa-union.org.