eLearning Africa

1st International Conference on ICT for Development, Education and Training, UNCC, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, May 24 - 26, 2006

eLearning Africa 2006 – 832 Participants from 80 Countries

Addis Ababa, 27 May 2006

832 participants from 80 countries gathered at the first „eLearning Africa" conference from May 24 – 26 in the United Nations Conference Center in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, making it the largest event on educational technologies and development ever taking place on the continent.

13 pre-conference workshops, five parallel topic strands with about 250 speakers and prominent keynotes as well as an exhibition with major vendors and service providers covered all aspects of eLearning in the development context and provided a massive capacity building event for all stakeholders and educational and training professionals. About 70% of the participants came from African countries – a figure that shows the vital interest in eLearning on the continent and made „eLearning Africa" a real African conference. Europe was represented by 20,6% followed by North America with 4,8%, the Asia Pacific with 1,6%, the Middle East with 0.8%, and Latin America with 0.3%.

Africa is on the move and ICT supported education is high on the agenda of most African governments. ICTs become integrated in many national educational system in order to reach the Millennium Goal of „Education for All". This was especially strengthened in the opening session chaired by H.E. Dr. Sintayehu Woldemichael, Ethiopian Minister of Education. This plenary featured keynotes given by Josephine Ouedraogo, Deputy Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa and H.E. Ato Tefera Waluwa, Minister for Capacity Building, Ethiopia who both shared the patronage of eLearning Africa 2006. Ethiopia with its massive investment in ICT infrastructure certainly provides an outstanding case in Africa, and as Ato Tefera Waluwa emphasised, views ICT not as a luxury but as a pre-condition for an accelerated development: „We recognize that while ICT may be a luxury for the rich, for us the poor countries, it is a vital and essential tool for fighting poverty, for beating poverty that kills and ensuring our survival."

Jacques Babot from the European Commissions' Directorate General „Information Society and Media" expressed Europe's vital interest in an European – African R&D cooperation under the umbrella of the new EU strategy for accelerating development in Africa, formulated by the European Commission in late 2005 . His address was supported on Friday, May 26, by the greeting note of Timothy Clarke, Head of the European Commission Delegation based in Addis Ababa, in the plenary session on "Development Cooperation, ICT and the Potential of eLearning".

Support to Africa was also offered by India, another highly diverse country that faces similar challenges like the African nations. Honorable Mohd. Ali Ashraf Fatmi, the Indian Minister of State for Human Resource Development, detailed his country's strategy for promoting technology in education which includes the rapid deployment of ICT infrastructure, training of teachers to use ICT, and the provision of varied

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learning resources and services. He said India would not only share this experience with African countries but help them with an ambitious $50 million programme to connect all the 53 nations of the African Union through an integrated satellite, fibre optics and wireless network for eLearning, eHealth and vairous other eServices. Five universities, 53 R&D centres, 10 advanced hospitals and 53 rural health posts will be connected and various services from India will be provided.

„eLearning Africa" - in a range of workshops and sessions - supplied a unique opportunity for African educational experts to network with peers from the continent as well as European and other international stakeholders offering cutting edge ICT based solutions for education and training. Many ambitious projects have been presented at the conference by education providers, government institutions, corporations, vendors and partners from international development organizations.

The event clearly set a landmark in the development of eLearning in Africa, giving an overview of the status of ICT supported education in the countries as well as offering a platform to discuss major issues and challenges that are ahead. As a major wakeup call to African governments and stakeholders „eLearning Africa" was characterised by Hon. Beth Mugo, Assistant Minister for Education, Science and Technology from Kenya during her opening keynote. African leaders and all other people working on the educational challenges on the continent should finally stop talking and start acting. Keynote speaker Dr Cheick Diarra, Microsoft Chairman for Africa, finally stressed the importance of education and learning in peoples lifes. Africa should be enabled to partake in the development of knowledge societies, a progress which could be enhanced by ICT.

Major international organisations were represented both in the programme and at the exhibition space, among them the African Union, the African Virtual University, the Global Development Learning Network (GDLN), the World Health Organisation (WHO), the three German development agencies DED, GTZ and InWEnt, the African Development Bank and the NEPAD e-Africa commission.

European - African R&D cooperation had a prominent place at the conference. The two EU-African R&D projects BEANISH and „IST Africa" were presented as good practice examples at the full day pre-conference workshop „European-African R&D projects for bridging the digital divide" with 60 African participants. At this workshop R&D proposals submitted from African institutions prior to the event and posted on a dedicated workshop website were discussed by the European and African panelists and networking between European and African experts was fostered. The Special Focus session „The New EU-African Partnership Framework" featured examples of developments in technology-enhanced learning supported by the European Commission which are of particular relevance and value to learning organisations in Africa.

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The conference enjoyed the support of the European Commission „Directorate General Information Society and Media" and Schoolnet Africa. African participation was partly sponsored by the „Swedish Program for ICT Developing Regions – SPIDER", the African Development Bank, the Ford Foundation, the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Rockefeller Foundation, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

eLearning Africa is a new conference organised by ICWE GmbH and Hoffmann&Reif that focuses on ICT for development, education and training in Africa. The event will support the emerging Pan-African eLearning community and further foster the network of decision makers from governments and administrations with universities, schools, governmental and private training providers, industry, and relevant partners in development cooperation. Each year a different African country will serve as the venue.

Conference website: http://www.eLearning-Africa.com

About the Organisers:
International Conferences, Workshops and Exhibitions („ICWE") is an international conference organiser with a focus on education and training. As a specialist in the fields of eLearning, higher education, language training and study abroad programmes, ICWE organises a range of international conferences and exhibitions worldwide each leading in their field. ICWE provides the world largest annual international eLearning conference since 1995 "Online Educa Berlin".
http://www.online-educa.com

Hoffmann & Reif Consultants ("HRC") have been involved in various flagship projects for the advancement of an eEurope since 1988. Since 1996 HRC have been helping to bridge the digital divide in developing countries. This includes the implementation of enabling applications for capacity building, eLearning, and collaboration accross continents, as well the support for change management and service development in a number of African and Asian countries.
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