INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION DIRECTORATE

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Innovation and Evidence in African Education: Key Symposium Findings

The African Union Pan African Institute for Education for Development (AU-IPED) hosted the 3rd GPE KIX Continental Symposium on Research in Education in Addis Ababa, in November 2024, under the theme: *Educate an African fit for the 21st century: Building resilient education systems for increased access to inclusive, lifelong, quality, and relevant learning in Africa*.

The symposium brought together policymakers, researchers, and education leaders from across Africa to address challenges in education and highlighted the critical role of innovation, evidence-based policymaking, and collaboration in transforming education outcomes. A wealth of insights and actionable recommendations emerged from the discussions. Here are some of the key findings and takeaways from the event:

1. Evidence-Based Policymaking
Participants emphasized the need to strengthen research infrastructure and build the capacity of African researchers. The African Education Research Database (AERD) was highlighted as a valuable tool for making research more visible and accessible to policymakers.

Additionally, the symposium called for greater collaboration between researchers, policymakers, and practitioners to ensure that research findings translate into actionable policies. It was strongly emphasized that research should not just sit on shelves; it must inform the decisions that shape the future of education in Africa.

2. Equity and Inclusion: Leaving No One Behind
Despite progress in expanding access to education, sub-Saharan Africa still has the highest rates of children without access to education, especially girls, children with disabilities, and marginalized communities. The symposium emphasized the urgent need to address these disparities through specific interventions.

Innovative solutions like assistive technologies in Rwanda and community-driven programs like Campaign for Female Education (CAMFED) in Zambia were showcased as models for inclusive education.

3. Teacher Development:
Teachers are the backbone of education systems, yet challenges like inadequate training and low motivation remain. The symposium highlighted successful initiatives, such as WhatsApp-based teacher training in Zimbabwe and the use of Open Educational Resources (OER) in Togo, as scalable solutions.

4. Harnessing Technology for Learning
From robotics in Rwandan classrooms to AI tools in Chad**,** technology has the potential to revolutionize education. However, equitable access to digital resources remains a hurdle, with calls for equitable access to technology across Africa and broader implementation of platforms designed to support early learning and revision for pre-schoolers, to improve educational outcomes.

5. Early Childhood Education: A Foundation for Lifelong Learning
Despite its proven benefits, access to quality early childhood education (ECE) remains limited in many African countries, particularly in rural areas.

The symposium called for increased investment in ECE, including the development of gender-sensitive teacher training programs and the expansion of public pre-primary education offerings. There is an urgent need to raise awareness among parents about the importance of early childhood development.

6. Leadership and Governance: Building Resilient Systems

Effective leadership and governance are necessary for building resilient education systems. The symposium highlighted the critical role of school leaders in creating positive learning environments and promoting student outcomes. Participants also emphasized the importance of decentralizing education management to empower local authorities and promote accountability.

The symposium called for the development of robust Education Management Information Systems (EMIS) to improve data collection, analysis, and interpretation. From the discussions, it emerged that quality data is the foundation of good policy and African countries need to invest in systems that provide accurate, real-time information to guide decision-making.

A Call to Action: Moving from Research to Practice

The symposium concluded with a strong call to action, urging governments, researchers, and stakeholders to work together to translate research findings into policy and practice. It emphasized the need for increased investment in education, particularly in teacher training, early childhood education, and education technology.

As we look to the future, the challenge will be to ensure that the insights and recommendations from the symposium are implemented across the 44 African countries. This will require concerted efforts from all stakeholders, as well as innovative approaches to address the unique challenges faced by African education systems.

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