ICT, internet can transform education in Africa

KIGALI, Rwanda: Connected learning is key to improving education in Africa, says the Internet Society in a report presented at a conference bringing together internet and development organisations from throughout Africa.

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Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and the internet in particular, can have a transformative effect on education in Africa, says a report launched by the Internet Society.

At the Africa Regional Internet and Development Dialogue taking place today in Kigali, Rwanda, the Internet Society revealed the results of a study entitled "Internet for Education in Africa – Helping Policymakers to Meet the Global Education Goals".

The new report assesses how the internet is used in the education sector in Africa. It also looks at the untapped opportunities by examining experiences in other regions, and provides recommendations for policymakers to help encourage learning via the internet.

Expanded connectivity thanks to increased access to mobile broadband and the development of submarine cables enabled more than a quarter of the African population (approximately 341 million people) to have internet access in 2016. This represents a significant opportunity to use the internet to provide education and learning opportunities.

However, the report underscores that integration of ICTs and leveraging the Internet for education requires clear vision and strategy and, most importantly, commitment accompanied by investment in broadband connectivity, learning resources, and technical support.

"A skilled workforce that can use Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) effectively to solve Africa's problems will also determine Africa's competitiveness in the global economy," explains Dawit Bekele, Africa Regional Bureau Director for the Internet Society. "And policymakers have a critical role to play in creating the necessary ecosystem for integrating ICT in education," he added.

The Internet Society's Enabling Environment Framework provides guidance and highlights the necessity of encouraging infrastructure development, fostering skills and entrepreneurship and establishing governance for the internet ecosystem – with a particular focus on clear and holistic policies for ICT in education in Africa.

Key advantages

Some of the key advantages of internet learning outlined in the report are:

- The internet provides alternative learning tools to address some education challenges in Africa such as the lack of learning materials and teachers.
- The internet can reach more individuals and disseminate content and learning resources at a lower cost.
- It can remove certain economic and social barriers to education such as geography, gender, and disabilities.
- It provides greater flexibility for any-time, any-place education, particularly for those who are working and want to pursue professional development.

The first ever Africa Regional Internet and Development Dialogue opened in Kigali, Rwanda, in partnership with UNESCO and Republic of Rwanda Ministry of Youth and ICT. Experts included government and inter-governmental organisation officials, business and educational leaders from throughout the continent to discuss how Africa can use the internet to advance education, innovation and job creation.

This conference is part of a global series of internet development conferences organised by the Internet Society with the aim of furthering the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) that aim at tackling the world's main development challenges by 2030. Regional internet development dialogues were held last year in Asia Pacific and Latin America.