

Linking Education and Employment in Africa

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Delegates at the opening ceremony of the ADEA Triennial conference in Ouagadougou



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More than six hundred delegates have been meeting in Burkina Faso this week to discuss education in Africa.

The aim is to find ways to support economic growth by improving education and job training programs.

The delegates include education ministers and representatives of civil society, business, labor and youth groups. The meeting, held every three years, is known as the Triennial.

Ahlin Byll-Cataria is executive secretary of the Association for the Development of Education in Africa. His group organized the weeklong conference.

He says there is a missing link between education and employment in Africa. For example, schools need to improve technical training for students who do not continue to secondary education.

Mr. Byll-Cataria says educational programs need to be reshaped to better fit the needs of employers. He says this is already happening in some countries including Tunisia, where the association is based.

AHLIN BYLL-CATARIA: "For instance, where they have to train engineers, there is a lot of discussion between the schools and the companies in order to know the demands of the company, to take them into account in the curriculum and even in the management of the schools. So that is exactly what we want also to promote during this Triennial."

In Mali, an association of artisans is working to improve the skills of mechanics, wood workers and tradesmen. That association has also helped workers and companies to win government contracts.

Several West African countries are working together to develop a network of trade and vocational schools. The idea is based in part on a successful example developed by Nigeria.

Mr. Byll-Cataria says educators are working to connect government-run school systems with other groups that are helping educate students. These include nongovernmental organizations, community literacy centers and faith-based groups. Among these groups are Islamic schools, or madrassas, that are expanding what they teach.

Another subject for the conference was peace education. The idea grew out of the violence in Kenya related to elections in two thousand seven. The idea of peace education has since spread to countries including Rwanda, Somalia, Ivory Coast, Sierra Leone and Liberia.

New technology offers a way for Africans living elsewhere in the world -- the African diaspora -- to aid development in their home country. For example, a professor from Burkina Faso living in the United States could use videoconferencing to teach a class back home.

And that's the VOA Special English Education Report. I'm Christopher Cruise.

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