



The African Union (AU) Continental Teacher Award 2020

Theme: Schools as development hubs to empower teachers after COVID-19

Event Report

21 December 2020 (10pm-14pm EAT)

Zoom

+70 Participants

Introduction

Monday, 21 December 2020, UNESCO-IICBA, the coordinator of the Teacher Development CESA cluster, participated in the second Continental teacher Award Ceremony hosted by the African Union. The AU Teacher Prize has been established as a means for demonstrating respect for teachers and the teaching profession, by encouraging and celebrating the committed teachers in Africa. According to the AU, the Prize raises the status of teaching, facilitates sharing of best practices in teacher excellence, and inspires the best possible candidates to join the teaching profession. Furthermore, the AU Teacher Prize is meant to serve as a catalyst for similar programs at regional and national levels.

This Award ceremony has been organized by the AU with the support of its key partners including the EU, UNESCO-IICBA, and AfECN. As the AU teacher Prize 2019, this second edition also focused on those teaching at the secondary school level only.

The moderator, Mr. Caseley Olabode Stephens, Policy Officer - Education, HRST, AUC, introduced the participants and reminded participants that the Teacher Prize is an important and valuable instrument that contributes to the success of Agenda 2063 and the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA).

COVID-19 has affected the livelihood and lifestyle of children, youth and adults at all levels of education. Prevention measures for the pandemic means a lot of disruption in the way of teaching and learning. The prolonged closure of learning institutions in response to the COVID-19 presented an unprecedented risk to the education system on the continent, the pandemic has hit education hard worldwide as of march 2020, according to the UNESCO report, school closures affected over 400 million learners in Africa.

Mr. Stephens explained that COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in at least one positive thing, the much appreciation on the importance of schools and teachers. As young people struggle to learn from home, the community has recognized the critical role of care givers, teachers and schools. Schools not only provide a space for learners to acquire knowledge and skills, but they also provide them with a secure foundation in nutrition, health and hygiene, mental health, psychological support and significantly reduce the risks of early pregnancy and many other side effects.

The ongoing pandemic may cause serial setback of the effort made on providing education for all in Africa. Now it's time to look on how education can emerge stronger from this global crisis. It is in this regard that the AU brought up the topic of "Schools as development hub to empower teachers after Covid-19" with this event.

During this period of COVID-19 crisis, the AU commission through its department HRST came up with three pillars for transforming education in Africa:

- DOTSS approach,
- Innovating education in Africa,
- Operationalization of the pan-African quality assurance framework.

It is important to note that, strong and inclusive public education systems are essential to ensure a long-term recovery of the society.

Opening remarks

H.E Prof. Sarah Anyang Agbor, AU Commissioner for HRST - AUC delivered her opening statement by thanking AU member states, EU and all AU education partners for their support in the realization of this event and applauding the awardees.

To highlight the importance of education, the commissioner shared a quote of Nelson Mandela saying, “Education is the great engine of personal development. It is through education that the daughter of a peasant can become a doctor, that the son of a mine worker can become the head of the mine, that a child of farm workers can become the president of a great nation. It is what we make out of what we have, not what we are given, that separates one person from another.”

“When talking about the stories of education, teachers are often left behind,” she said. There can be no quality education without teachers, there can be no young people to meet tomorrow without teachers. Note that each profession is developed by a teacher, so teaching as a profession should not be viewed as a career of last resort.

The Commissioner stressed the need for teacher development to achieve Agenda 2063 and CESA and part of this teacher development is teacher mobility, teacher motivation framework, teacher qualification framework, and teacher award. According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, Africa needs 20 million teachers to achieve universal primary and secondary education by 2030.

The Commissioner underlined the fact that education partners are keen to help Member States ensure that we have a quality teacher for quality education in Africa.

In his opening remarks **Mr. Thomas Huyghebaert**, Head of policy and Development Cooperation, EU Delegation to AUC, also congratulated the awardees and underscored the importance of education and teachers. Mr. Thomas recalled the partnership that AU has with EU and mentioned a certain number of initiatives that are jointly ongoing which are very critical related to teacher mobility and development and all the continental framework and documents related to quality and professionalization of teachers ongoing, including:

- The development of the African Continental qualification framework
- Vocational education and training colleges in the EU to set ups student and staff exchange with colleges in Africa.

He continued saying that in a fast-changing world, the role of teachers and the expectations placed on them are evolving tools as they are faced with challenges of new skills and requirements, technological development and growing socio-cultural diversity, and the need to respond to more individualized teaching and special learning. This call to pull together efforts to continue investing in our teachers and upgrading their professional development. Mr. Thomas closed his remarks by saying that the EU stands ready to further deepen this cooperation and policy dialogue with the AU.

Dr. Yumiko Yokozeki, Director of UNESCO-IICBA, Coordinator of the Teacher Development CESA Cluster, stressed that teaching is the noblest and most honorable profession in the world and that teachers must be empowered, recognized, and respected. On this basis, the AU Teachers Award is a great opportunity to appreciate the excellent work done by teachers. She congratulated the winners and expressed her gratitude for UNESCO-IICBA’s association with the 2020 AU Teacher Award.

Dr. Yumiko shared UNESCO-IICBA’s mandate to strengthen teacher policy and development in Africa and its strategic goals including increasing the supply of qualified teachers and enhancing the teacher support and motivation among member states in Africa. She explained how UNESCO-IICBA’s mandate as well as strategic goals are very much in line with the AU continental agenda 2063 and the CESA 2016-2024.

Dr. Yumiko strongly highlighted the role that UNESCO-IICBA and the Teacher Development cluster has played in training and empowering teachers during this period of school closures, including trainings to teachers on distance learning mechanisms and peace and resilience. She mentioned that despite the challenges associated with schools’ closure, teachers played a key role in ensuring learning never stops and fostering peace in young people’s mind.

In closing her remarks, Dr Yumiko said: “The Teacher Development Cluster will continue to make every effort to contribute to the improvement of the teaching profession in Africa, notably by supporting the development of policies aimed at improving the working conditions of teachers, developing teachers’ capacities to adapt to the change, and improving the social-economic status of a teacher. This is how we will achieve the sustainable development goals as well as the goals of CESA and the Africa we want 2063.”

Testimony from the winners of 2019 AU Teacher Award:

In the next session, Mr. Stephens invited the winners of the 2019 AU Teacher Awards to testify about their journey after being recognized as Teacher Champions. They all thanked the AUC and its partners for this initiative and all their work to improve the teaching profession. Among all the 2019 winners, the career grew after receiving the AU award and they are ready to go the extra mile.

Ms Augusta Lartey- Young: After being awarded she has been promoted by the ministry of education from assistant director to deputy director, and further as assistant headmistress of another school. During this period of COVID-19, she initiated a project of distributing books to support children to continue learning. She is also Involved in mentorship program to girls from poor homes who have interests pursuing higher education.

Rev Sis. Gladycy Kachope: After being awarded, she continued being an outstanding teacher and a headteacher. She tried her best to give self-esteem to students (girls) and empower them, as a result her school became the first in the whole district in 2019 and the sixth at the country level both in Advance level and Ordinary level. The award gave her the opportunity to attend different conferences and be invited to give lectures to teachers from different schools. During COVID-19, she participated in distance learning and she also helped her students in making hand sanitizers.

Mr. Eric Ademba: He shared that the award motivated him and increased his passion of teaching. The lesson he learnt is that naturally ambitions requires attention, focus and determination, that teaching is just a service and requires commitments. He noted that teaching should inspire learners.

Mr. Stephens, introduced Prof. Elizabeth Sarange Bosire Abenga, Director PAU - Institute of Governance Human Resource and Social Sciences, Yaoundé, Cameroon, and Prof. Esther Titilayo Akinlabi, Director PAU - institute of Life and Earth Sciences (PAULESI), Ibadan, Nigeria. These two will facilitate the session of the Award ceremony.

Award Ceremony

Prof. Abenga briefly emphasized the importance of recognizing competent teachers. She also noted that quality education is essential and that 21st-century teachers need to have certain skills and values. As the saying goes, all education systems are as better than their teachers, so you can make or break a nation because of the quality of their teachers.

Prof. Abenga announced the six awardees of AU teacher Award 2020. And invited them to introduce themselves.

- Mrs. Jane W. Kimiti Kenya East Africa
- Mr. Khoody Yogesh Mauritius East Africa
- Mr. Lionga Stanley Siseho Namibia Afrique austral
- Mrs. Livhalani Bridget Sinyosi South Southern Africa
- Mrs. Theodosia Oppong Lartegy Ghana West Africa
- Mr. Olalekan Adeeko Ademola Nigeria West Africa

Then, a video presentation of the selected awardees was played to see their testimonials of what they did in their schools and community. In the video we saw the actual work they do on the ground, the role of involving stakeholders and having partnership to overcome challenges, involving students in activities that are at community level interests as well as global interest such as environmental conservation, the role of using innovative pedagogical strategies such as the inclusion of ICT, continuous teacher development, mentorship and knowledge transfer.

Subsequently, the facilitator invited H.E Prof. Sarah Anyang Agbor, to present the Awards to the AU teacher award 2020 winners on behalf of the AUC Chairperson, H.E Dr. Moussa Faki Mahamat. After receiving their awards, all of the winners expressed their gratitude and commitment to do more.

Panel discussion with the Awarded Teachers

Prof. Abenga invited the 2020 winners to discuss the topic of the day: "Schools as development centers to empower teachers after COVID-19."

Mrs. Kimiti shared that when schools reopened in Kenya, her school teachers were empowered and came up with very good decisions especially on COVID-19 protocol and responses. She noted that teachers were much involved in taking decisions. Teachers have also been empowered on professional growth especially due to teacher development that Kenya is going through. She mentioned that after being empowered teachers felt able to impact the society and the fact that they are recognized have made them better and motivated. **Mr. Yogesh** said that during school closure we lost a lot and it was challenging but educators found solutions despite the limited resources. He emphasized on the need to build education systems that are resilient to disruption and change. Adding to what has been mentioned, Mr. Siseho and Mrs. Bridget called for teachers' collaboration and to use more efforts, be committed and love their work.

"Now, after several months at home due to COVID-19, the willingness of students to return to school will depend on the teachers." **Ms. Theodosia** mentioned. Statistics show that a number of girls, in particular, are at risk of not going back to school. Teachers should therefore reach out to them. She echoed the need for teachers to improve their computer skills and the need for community engagement. She mentioned that it will be the role of teachers to engage the community to be part of the new education system. **Mr. Ademola** also highlighted that teachers need trainings, equipment and support to do their work. He then shared the experience on how his school became a learning hub for teachers.

With the animation of **Prof. Esther Titilayo Akinlabi**, followed the questions and answers part of the panel discussion in which participants actively interacted with the awardees.

Q1. How has Namibia been able to deal with the health measure of social distancing in school since students were recalled especially in the dormitory in boarding school?

- **Mr. Siseho:** It was really a challenge from the beginning and it is still is. The dormitories were fine to meet the social distancing measure. When they go for there, they took turns rather than everyone at the same time. We also installed tippy taps around the school hostel and in front of each classroom. Each classroom had hand sanitizer. temperature was checked every morning and all learners wore face masks all the time.

Q2. Have there been any developments in how to ensure quality is maintained with online learning? that M&E, evaluations, and feedback were not compromised during these periods of virtual learning?

- **Mrs. Bridget:** Yes, example in my school, we were having WhatsApp groups and learners would post and write in the group and the teacher would mark and it was excellent in the follow-ups.

Q3. The perception of online learning in school in Nigeria is that they are of poor quality. What is the narrative? what is the perception regarding online learning?

- **Mr. Ademola:** Yes, during the lockdown a number of public schools were unable to implement remote learning but now many trainings for teachers are ongoing and the job to develop teachers' skills is for everyone (teachers, community and the government).

Q4. What are teachers going to do to get pregnant teenagers back to school? Has anything been done?

- **Mrs. Lartegy:** Yes, with a lot of encouragement from their teachers. And in Ghana teachers are being sensitized to handle those girls very well when they return back to school. Schools also have trained counselors.

The Role of Teachers vis-à-vis DOTSS and COVID

Dr. Lynette OKENGO, Director AfECN, introduced the panelists for this session and recalled that we cannot achieve any progress without paying attention to teachers. She mentioned that AfECN is delighted to be part of the Teacher Development cluster and are committed to making their contribution.

Afterward, **Dr. Njora Hungi**, Senior Project Officer, UNESCO-IICBA made a presentation on "Unpacking the DOTSS Framework". Below are the key points of his presentation:

According to the UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS), the current education challenges in Africa includes:

- Large populations of out of school children of primary age (~34.8m) and adolescents (~70.5m)

- High dropout rates - E.g. 25% fail to transition from primary to secondary in SSA
- Low secondary completion rates among girls ($\approx 20\%$)
- Poor school participation among kids with disabilities ($<10\%$) and among children from nomadic and pastoralist communities

In summary, there is a large population of out of school children. Those in school are dropping out and/or not learning due to poor quality education and school leavers face challenges in transitioning from school to work because they do not have the requisite skills for work and life.

The usual approaches we have such as building of additional classrooms, recruitment and training of teachers are very useful but more have to be done because those approaches can't/won't solve the problem.

AU DOTSS framework:

- An integrated approach to transforming Africa's education systems
- Encourages Member States to reach every child to learn whether in crisis situation (e.g. COVID-19) or in reaching those in most marginalized situations

DOTSS involves ...

Digital and electrical connectivity to all schools;

Online learning to compliment offline learning;

Teacher & caregivers as facilitators and motivators of learning – developing teacher capacity especially in ICT;

Safety to learn online and offline;

Skills focused learning – holistic approach

For the DOTSS framework for the transformation of education in Africa to succeed, we need to invest, strengthen institutions, innovate as Africans and, be implement it.

After Mr. Hungi's presentation three panelists including, Professor Steve Nwokeocha, AFTRA, Tertiary school expert, Mr. Orwa Samwel, Primary/Secondary school teacher, Kenya and Ms. Maureen Chimfwembe, ECDE teacher, Zambia, shared information and experiences on the role of teachers in the implementation of DOTSS and how DOTSS works in the COVID-19 environment. Animated by **Janet OUKO, AfECN**. All panelists applauded the award winners and mentioned that the teacher award means a lot to teachers of all education levels.

Starting with **Professor Steve**, he mentioned that if DOTSS is implemented successfully, it can put Africa in a resilient mode. He explained that although there are many universities in Africa, part of the challenge is not just the capacity of teachers. Teachers don't have tools, no connectivity and, of course, students don't have them either and DOTSS advocates for that. We don't have to work just the traditional way; we need to start running digital both online and offline together to make institutions resilient and to easily migrate to digital platforms.

Mr. Orwa Samwel underlined the need to further equip African teachers with ICT skills. "During school closures, the important role that teachers were supposed to play was missed as they had digital skills challenges. We must therefore advocate for them to be more autonomous." He mentioned.

Ms. Maureen Chimfwembe, also underlined that, according to DOTSS, teachers are facilitators and motivators and in order for them to facilitate, monitor, supervise and lead learning, they must be equipped with the necessary equipment for the proper execution of their work.

Prof. Esther thanked the panelists, facilitators and participants and concluded the session by sharing a Japanese proverb that says, "Better than a thousand days of diligent study is a day with a great teacher. And a quote from Malcolm X who says: "Education is the passport to the future, because tomorrow belongs to those who prepare for it today".

Closing remarks

In her closing remarks, H.E Prof. Sarah Anyang Agbor congratulated again the AU teacher awardees 2020 for their dedication and commitment. The commissioner also thanked AU member states, the AU education division and education stakeholders for their contribution to the realization of this event. Moving forward, the commissioner underlined the need to work together to ensure that quality education is maintained and the need to invest more in remote learning in order to bridge the digital divide, all for the future of the African Youth.

ANNEX:

The Teacher Prize contributes to the success of Agenda 2063 and the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA), with the following objectives:

- Enhance visibility and status of the Teacher in Africa at all levels - Preprimary, Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary including TVET;
- Promote Teaching as a first-choice profession at all levels; and
- Celebrate and encourage outstanding teachers.

Selection process:

Ministers responsible for Education in AU Member States was requested to nominate and submit names of two teachers, one male and one female, and through a competitive process, the winning teachers were selected for demonstrating the following qualities:

- Engaging in quality teaching which results in high standards of student achievement;
- Demonstrated knowledge of the subject matter, while keeping up with recent developments;
- Encouraging desirable behaviors among students through positive feedback and other methods;
- Managing classes to enhance the quality of learning processes, while ensuring accommodation of students with varied learning needs and abilities;
- Engaging in activities and networks that enhance the social and cultural value of learning;
- Helping students to achieve their long-term career goals by organizing engagement with relevant agencies and information;
- Demonstrating multi-valency in facilitating acquisition of knowledge and skills, as well as values for peace building and responsible citizenship
- Positive engagement with fellow teachers encouraging mutual learning;
- Positive reputation from stakeholders and community members;
- Highly commended by students and staff members.

For the 2020 edition of the African Union Continental Teacher Awards, prizes of **\$10 000** each and a **certificate** of recognition were awarded to six teachers selected as champions in ensuring quality education in Africa.

If you have any questions or comments regarding this event Report, please do not hesitate to contact Uwingabiye Immaculee Kevine at ik.uwingabiye@unesco.org

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