CAFOR	AFRICAN UNION

AFRICAN UNION COMMISSION

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CONCEPT NOTE

CAFOR project: Digital Schools Initiative

1. Project Summary

This project will use Information and Communication Technology to equip African youths with digital skills. It will promote access to ICT in education among school-going age children on the continent. The project will advocate for effective, relevant policies integrating information and communication technology (ICT) that will drive and strategically accelerate the transformation of education and training systems for young Africans as powerful instruments for producing the human capital that Africa needs for its sustainable development.

Africa has a mass of knowledge and innovative practices that can inspire other initiatives and inform ICT integration policies. The relevance and effectiveness of policies on integrating ICT in education and training in Africa would depend on these policies' capacity to move the levers of change. These would entail using strategic and operational planning to integrate ICT in education and training in Africa; education of the personnel that constitute the main vectors of change: administrators, inspectors, teachers, and trainers; and the availability of digital resources.

CAFOR will partner with organizations and institutions working to promote ICT in education to develop understanding further and build a shared vision of how ICT can be relevant and useful in improving accessibility and quality in African education and training systems. The fullest integration of ICT is crucial in enabling the paradigm shift needed to transform education and training systems that would support the acquisition of the critical knowledge, skills, and qualifications for accelerated and sustainable development in Africa. CAFOR will support African countries through its regional initiatives in developing national policies and action plans that will help integrate ICT in their education and training systems.

2. Problem Relevance

The COVID-19 pandemic has made ICT use in education and training more relevant now than ever before. Moreover, Africa's rapidly growing youth population presents a potentially pivotal group for innovation, dynamism, and creativity. However, everything will depend on whether this group is facilitated to acquire the requisite skills to contribute to their countries' economic growth and social development as required and as universally regarded as essential for today's technology-driven knowledge societies.

The biggest challenge will be to provide **an inclusive and quality educational experience at varying levels to ensure** competencies in Mathematics, Science, and ICT subjects; skills for higher-order thinking, analysis and synthesis, teamwork and developing an enterprising mentality are seen as crucial to the future social and economic development of Africa.

African governments recognize that **education is an essential priority** in the new 2030 agenda for sustainable development. They increasingly realize that ICT deployment and integration can improve their education systems in general and in secondary education in particular.

Although the challenges facing African education and training systems are formidable, ICT use can considerably ease some of them. These include providing access to quality education and training for all African citizens (at present, more than 30 million children of primary school age do not attend school); making up the shortage of teachers, which is estimated at over 30 per cent of the teaching force, or more than a million teachers; improving the quality of instruction and teaching methods; and enhancing both the availability and the relevance of school textbooks.

The fact is that the use of ICTs can: (i) enhance the relevance and quality of education and training; and (ii) offer marginalized population groups, particularly female and rural learners, increased opportunities for learning and skills development. Education systems must also empower learners by giving them a digital culture and the ICT knowledge, skills and qualifications that will enable them to become full-fledged stakeholders in the knowledge society.

3. Call to Action

Lessons drawn from the past have shown that integrating ICT in education and training remains a challenge, owing to education stakeholders' insufficient involvement in policymaking and steering. Moreover, the cultures brought together by the integration process are different – on one side, the highly innovative and dynamic ICT sector, and on the other, the relatively conservative education sector – which makes their interaction more difficult.

CAFOR will support ongoing dialogue that will bring together decision-makers from African Education Ministries and representatives of development bodies, the private ICT sector and civil society. This platform is indispensable to give the various stakeholders a shared understanding of ICT's opportunities, the policies and strategies needed for the efficient use of ICT by education and training systems, and the paradigm shifts required for successful integration of ICT.

CAFOR will partner with other organizations to review lessons drawn from countries that have reached different phases of ICT integration in education and training; the formulation, financing, implementation and monitoring of ICT policies; ICT as a contributor to teachers' professional

development and improvement in teaching practices; the development and sharing of digital content; the deployment of ICT hardware and connectivity issues; challenges in scaling up ICT integration practices; learning opportunities via cell phones; the use of ICT to expand learning opportunities for marginalized population groups; and public-private partnerships for ICT in education. Other varying challenges will include teacher training, curriculum content that would match skills with jobs to students' information, communication, and technology (ICT) skills, technical and vocational education, and training (TVET), and physically bringing technology into the classroom and use it also outside the school to ensure that complete quality learning takes place.

Given the relevance and exigencies of the use of ICT in education and training now more than ever before, and as consistent with promoting science, technology and innovations on the continent with the provision of educational access to every African citizen, CAFOR will advocate for African governments to as of now invest in e-learning and m-learning initiatives. This drive should be part of the education strategy of every African government. Here, we refer to e-learning, the use of educational technology and distance education that focuses on learning across contexts and learning with mobile devices' help. Some interesting e-learning products have been gaining prominence in Africa so far. There are several ongoing projects, programmes and initiatives across Africa related to experiments with mobile phones, tablets and social media in teaching and learning. National policies on ICT in Education are being revisited in a few African countries, and implementation plans are being evaluated and renewed. New partnerships are being forged, new financing models are being designed, and innovation centres and technology-related start-up companies are mushrooming.

CAFOR will partner with others in the field to provide capacity building, technical and strategic support in AU member states seeking to harness the potential of ICT to increase access to and improve quality, equity and effectiveness of education, particularly with science, mathematics, and ICT subjects to help address the low numbers progressing to university to study STEM courses and, ultimately, to contribute to the socio-economic development of African countries.

(a) The Issues

In its bid to support an effective, sustainable and replicable model that would be consistent with CESA 16-25 to transform education in Africa, the CAFOR programme will work with like-minded organizations to :
- Improve the quality of teaching through ICT – based teacher professional development.
- Support school-wide integration of ICT in education to improve learning across the curriculum.
- Improve teaching and learning in STEM subjects to correct the low student take-up and mediocre achievement in STEM subjects.
- Encourage sourcing and regular usage of open education resources (OER) in the classroom.
- Define a minimum and affordable technology configuration for schools

(b) The Model

CAFOR will seek to adopt a model that will be consistent with CESA 16-25 and which would transform education through the use of digital technology and 21st-century level skills for teachers and students innovative practices in a way that is responsive to the needs of the market place and the emerging knowledge economies and societies.

The model is centred on two key elements of capacity building of schools and teachers as follows:

i. **A phased approach to whole school development for ICT use** integrating GESCI's new *digital school of Distinction frameworks* for developing *leadership and vision, ICT integration across the curriculum, ICT school culture, ICT teacher professional development and infrastructure and resources.*

- Bringing schools through a progression pathway from *'initial'* to *'e-enabled'* to *'e-mature'* to *'e-confident'* whole school ICT Integration.

ii. **A phased approach to teacher development for ICT uses** integrating new contextualized ICT competency frameworks for teachers to understand ICT integration *in educational policy, in the curriculum, in pedagogy, management and organization and professional learning.*

- Bringing teachers through progression pathways from *'initial'* to *'technology literacy'* to *'knowledge deepening'* to *'knowledge creation'* use of ICT in professional practice.

(c) **Focus on scaling**

As a pre-scaling programme, the Digital Schools Initiative programme will emphasize on the institutional level, targeting government institutional co-participation from national groups (ICT, curriculum, teacher development and evaluation institutes, departments and ministries) to local classes (schools, communities, county and regional directorates) in the development and management of the project (inclusive of monitoring, evaluation and learning). Institutionalization and sustainability are central to this programme, and CAFOR will work with various institutions to monitor progress in the programme.

(d) **Sponsorship and Funding:**

CAFOR is seeking sponsorship from partners and multilateral and bilateral agencies, and the private sector to support the management, implementation and monitoring and evaluation of this project in the following ways:

S. No.	SUMMARY BUDGET	Per Annum	Period (Yrs)	Personnel Deployed	Total (USD)
1	**STAFF COSTS**				
	Internal Staff Costs- Full Time Staff (2 % of total salary costs)	68636.63	5	4	343183.15
	Field Based Experts Costs - Project Period & Work	30000.00	5	5	750000
	Deploying 2 local field staff per country	500	5	10	25000
2	**PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION COSTS**				
	Innovating education	12000	5		60000
	Workshops and Seminars to move to digital education & elearning	10000	5		50000
	Basic ICT Teacher training & Competencies	12500	5		62500
	Teacher professional development training	15000	5		75000
	Provision of learning materials	30000	5		150000
	ICT Integration of schools	30000	1		30000
	Website development & MIS reporting	25000	1		25000
3	**Other Costs**				
	Communication Costs- Monthly Mobile Top-Ups, Printouts, Stationery, Shipping, Postage, etc (per annum per person)	3000	5	9	135000
	Monitoring ,Evaluation Costs & IT Costs in 5 countries	4000	5	5	100000
	Associated Costs (Supplies, Equipment Costs, etc)	50000	5	5	1250000
	Operational Costs - Office Set-up Costs, Office Equipment, Etc	40000	1	5	200000
4	**TRAVEL& TRANSPORTATION COSTS**				
	Travel Insurance	1350	5	9	60750
	Per Diems per day for internal staff	260	5	9	11700
	Per Diems per day for international staff	200	5	5	5000
	Local Travel Costs per month	1000	5	9	45000
	International Travel Costs	600	5	9	27000
5	**TOTAL AMOUNT**				**3405133**
6	**MISCELLANEOUS EXPENDITURE**				
	Calculated at 15% of TOTAL Amount				510769.9725
7	**GRAND TOTAL**				**3,915,903**

Sponsors may expect recognition in a few ways:

- Sponsors may be included in a roll of honour, hosted on the cafor website www.cafor.org, with the African Union's recognition.
- Sponsors will be recognized in presentations at conferences and meetings as having supported education in Africa.
- Should a sponsor wish to remain anonymous, this will be respected by CAFOR.

4. Conclusion

Through this Digital Schools Initiative programme, young Africans will now envision how they will embark on promising careers using new skills acquired with the support of ICTs. For instance, E-learning initiatives on the continent such as Open and Distance Learning can help actors, musicians, and storytellers to make a good living. Many other best practices need to be identified, articulated, documented, and publicized. These include other ongoing initiatives in Africa that involve self-employment and entrepreneurship in both the formal and informal sectors, linking informal sector activities with the digital economy, and further linking these to an integrated strategy that governments and the private sector should deliver, and with the support of NGOs and international agencies.