

How education can be improved in Africa

Improving the level of education in Africa is essential for it to reach its full potential. How can that be done? Well, it's been done before on another continent. Over the past 60 years, the Republic of Korea has completely rewritten its story.

Once among the poorest nations, it is now a high-income industrial powerhouse. South Korea made a bold bet on education and training, using knowledge as the engine for growth. Its journey proves that investing in people can change a nation's destiny – a learning that makes Africa's renewed focus on education deeply encouraging. The payoff from education is hard to ignore. Even a single extra year of schooling can significantly boost a person's earning potential, often more than traditional investments. And the ripple effects go even further. In fact, a one percent improvement in learning is linked to a 7.2 percent jump in yearly growth. Education isn't just about personal advancement; it's the most effective tool we have to end inequality and build lasting progress.

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) stand out as a top driver of real economic impact. By focusing on market-relevant skills, TVET helps people build abilities that industries need. Singapore is a great example of how this approach pays off. Its Institute of Technical Education is among the best in the world and has played a major role in the country's impressive growth. The connection between TVET and job creation is convincing.

Countries like Rwanda and Ghana are seeing the benefits first-hand. Almost 70 percent of their TVET graduates are finding employment within a year, according to the African Centre for Economic Transformation's report, Building TVET Systems for Economic Transformation in Africa. Targeted training opens doors for young peo-

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Education



tional development. When education meets the needs of the job market, everyone wins. Africa is working to improve education, but funding remains a major hurdle. Historically, education has relied almost entirely on public funding. According to the Education Commission Report, around 97 percent of financing for public education systems worldwide has typically come from domestic resources. However, this model is under severe strain. Public debt across the continent has surged to \$1.8 trillion, nearly two-thirds of Africa's GDP. In 2024 alone, \$70 billion was spent on debt servicing, exceeding what many countries allocate to social programmes.

With debt consuming national budgets, governments are unable to invest as desired in education. Having worked extensively across Africa, I have witnessed first-hand the urgent need for greater education funding. This is why innovative public-private partnership (PPP) structures to help governments undertake critical social sector investments using private capital have been pioneered.

land's Export Credit Agency in West Africa to strategic frameworks signed with agencies such as UK Export Finance (UKEF), these initiatives demonstrate what is possible when creativity meets collaboration. The structure to finance several public sector education projects has received wide support from several multilateral and international banks. Education serves as both a social imperative and the cornerstone of economic growth and national development. But, without fresh ideas and innovative financing, progress risks stalling.

Forward-thinking countries can leverage innovative financing models to strengthen education systems. By combining government resources with private sector and development finance partnerships, these blended approaches reduce risk and attract investment. Long-term repayment structures also allow governments and partners to fund capital-intensive projects without heavy upfront costs, making ambitious reforms financially feasible.

These mechanisms enable governments to pursue large-scale reforms while maintaining fiscal stability. For example, in West Africa, Planet One mobilised international funding and guarantees for government-led projects by collaborating with global banks and export credit agencies, enabling low-interest loans, equity and guarantees. This approach accelerates infrastructure development, eases pressure on public budgets, and improves national creditworthiness, all while attracting foreign investment and advancing Sustainable Development Goals.

Over the years, I've witnessed how bold investment in education can transform nations. Ongoing successes show what's possible, and why Africa's next chapter must be built on skills and innovation.

Backed by innovative financing and strong partnerships, education can turn the continent's demographic advantage into economic strength. The question isn't whether change is possible, it's how quickly we act. The choices made today will define Africa's economic fortunes.

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