

News from Africa

Late May in Addis Ababa, the rain season was beginning a bit earlier than expected and the temperature is a little colder than expected, but this was not enough to diminish the enthusiasm of the participants to the *first eLearning Africa conference* held at the United Nations Conference Centre (UNCC) from May the 24th to the 26th. About 800 participants, representing 80 countries, followed a programme built on the communications of more than 230 experts from universities, industry, governmental and non-governmental institutions.

As a conference associated partner, Kaleidoscope participated in the programme of the conference and of one of the thirteen pre-conference seminars. This seminar, organised by Leopold Reif, co-organiser of the conference, was entitled “European-African R&D Projects for Bridging the Digital Divide”. It has been followed by 60 participants interested in



understanding better what was meant by R&D, and what would be the conditions for success of a proposal to a European call. Jacques Babot from the European Commission (picture 1) presented the opportunities and gave an idea of what could be expected in the context of the coming 7th Framework Programme. Concrete projects were also presented: the FP6 project IST-Africa and the success story of BEANISH, an eHealth FP6 project with partners in Botswana, Ethiopia, Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa, and Tanzania, led by the University of Oslo. But the most original and interesting part of the seminar was surely when the participants shared their ideas about possible projects

and the presenters took the risk to provide feedback and advice. There was a lot to learn about the needs and priorities of our African colleagues and the potential of a European contribution. Kaleidoscope could do a lot to shape a balanced approach between R&D and dissemination actions of TEL in Africa, by offering the support of the network competences, results and technologies; the discussions and contacts after the presentation of the network and during the conference seems to indicate that it has been understood.

Kaleidoscope members participated actively in the conference programme, including innovative contributions to the exhibition by CNOTINFOR (picture 2) and Lego. The Open University, a Kaleidoscope contractor, had several interesting contributions covering topics from the effective use of ICT to mobile learning and teacher training. Riga University, the Catholic university of Leuven, the universities of Duisburg, Lyon and Bristol demonstrated the dynamism of the Kaleidoscope contractors. Rosamund Sutherland from the



University of Bristol and Edmond Were from the Kigali Institute of Education, illustrated a successful collaboration exploring the effective use of ICT, its benefits and difficulties, in teaching and learning (picture 3); a project associating Rwanda, South Africa, Chile and the UK. This contribution to the Special Focus Session “The New EU-Africa Partnership Framework” organised by Hoffmann & Reif in collaboration with Kaleidoscope provided a good example of the type of projects Kaleidoscope could encourage and support: a

project sensitive to the local reality and innovative at a level which goes beyond the African context; we can all learn from its outcomes.

Several contributions, including the introductory talk of Cheick Modibo Diara at the conference Opening Session, emphasised issues that any R&D project should take into account to be meaningful in the African context: the large cultural and linguistic diversity, the unequal access (digital divide), the bandwidth cost, the lack of supportive infrastructure (including electricity), the human and financial resources. Even if this context is especially difficult and demanding, research priorities and dominant trends emerge which are in-line with the international research stake: mobile learning whereas the mobile phone is spreading so quickly across Africa, localisation of software including interface design and language based interactions. Teacher training and the development of resources easy to access and relevant to local context is a priority of the development of the ICT for education policy in Africa. The Kaleidoscope partners have the resources and could benefit a lot from investing in research on these topics, and several others, with African colleagues.

eLearning Africa is an annual event, it offers a lot of opportunities for Kaleidoscope partners and for the network as such, to bring contributions either in the form of seminars or tutorial, or within the programme associating African partners. The contacts of this year are a good indication of the potential benefit. Thanks a lot to Rebecca Stromeyer from ICWE, co-organiser of the conference with Leopold Reif, and Sally Reynolds, from ATiT, manager of the programme—two Kaleidoscope partners—for opening to us this opportunity for new collaborations. eLearning Africa is surely an initiative which deserves our support and active involvement.



A rest after a hard day: the Kaleidoscope partner Rosamund Sutherland with the project team Mphela Motimele (Wits University, South Africa) and Edmond Were (Kigali Institute of Technology, Rwanda) on the left and on the right Enrique Hinostraza. Leopold Reif, here on the right of Rosamund, and Nicolas Balacheff, on the left, were happy to join!