

GLOBAL PREPARATORY MEETING OF THE ANNUAL MINISTERIAL REVIEW (AMR) OF THE UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL ON "MEETING THE INTERNATIONALLY AGREED GOALS AND COMMITMENTS WITH REGARD TO EDUCATION"

My name is Kara Nichols, Executive Director of Connect To Learn, a global education initiative designed with the initial collaboration of the Earth Institute at Columbia University—that acts as our Scientific Advisors; Ericsson—the world’s leading provider of telecommunications equipment and related services for mobile and fixed network telecom operators; and Millennium Promise, an international non-profit organization solely committed to supporting the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals to halve extreme poverty by 2015.

Given the importance of education to ending poverty and ensuring a better life for people in developing countries, Connect To Learn is a global education initiative that aims to provide all children with access to a quality 21st century education—*through secondary school*, and with a special emphasis on girls.

We’re working to expand access to education in impoverished countries in two ways:

First, by identifying needy children who can’t afford to pay for schooling and providing them with full scholarships that send them all the way through secondary school. We emphasize educating girls because they are disproportionately excluded from school in many places around the world- and because there’s a growing consensus that educating girls is one of the best development solutions for ending poverty. It increases individual earning potential by up to 25 percent, and stimulates economic growth.

Secondly, we’re catalyzing public-private partnerships to bring information and communication technology (ICT) into resource-deprived classrooms in order to enhance the quality of educational resources available to both teachers and students – which is particularly important in remote areas.

UNESCO has highlighted the fact that if we are to achieve real developmental breakthrough, it’s critical that we not only send children to school, but improve the **quality** of education they receive. Millions of children are emerging from primary school with reading, writing and numeracy skills far below expected levels.

Connect To Learn launched its programs in Africa late last year, and when we arrived at the schools where we are working—in Ghana and Tanzania—the libraries were virtually empty. The only visible teaching resources for teachers were a chalkboard and a piece of chalk.

All of us sitting here today understand that Internet access unlocks a whole world of information. The opportunities for learning via ICT are vast and exciting - and they should be available to all children, everywhere.

Our partners at Ericsson tell us that mobile broadband subscriptions will grow from 600 million last year, to more than 4 billion in 2016. With wireless networks stretching rapidly across the earth there is clearly an enormous opportunity to partner with the ICT industries to not only expand learning opportunities in areas that have previously been cut off from technology, but revolutionize education in ways that have never before been possible.



“Connect To Learn at Work in Ghana Secondary Schools 2011”

LINK TO VIDEO:

<http://www.connecttolearn.org/media/video-library>

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By bringing cutting-edge ICT tools to under-resourced schools we can reduce the divide in education and literacy levels between developed and developing regions as well as ensure that impoverished countries don't fall dangerously far behind as the rest of the world becomes increasingly reliant on technology.

With a brief video, I'd like to give you a glimpse of our work in Africa, in Ghana, where we implemented our ICT solution in two schools earlier this year:

[\[LINK TO VIDEO\]](http://www.connecttolearn.org/media/video-library) "Connect To Learn at Work in Ghana Secondary Schools 2011"
<http://www.connecttolearn.org/media/video-library>

HOW CONNECT TO LEARN IS USING ICT FOR LEARNING SUPPORT

Our short film gave you an overview of our mission – and now I'd like to outline more specifically how we're using technology to enhance the performance of teachers and improve the learning experience for students in Ghana and Tanzania.

THE ICT SOLUTION: "PC AS A SERVICE"

With generous contributions from Ericsson, that is also working to bring additional partners in from the telecommunications industry, Connect To Learn is bringing cutting-edge broadband technology into some of the most under-resourced schools in the world. Relying on cloud computing, as you heard from the film, Connect to Learn is able to provide schools with high-end computing and Internet access that is cost-efficient, durable, and very low-maintenance. Basic training is provided for teachers and ICT tutors to support effective use of the new equipment and learning resources in the classroom. Ongoing monitoring and evaluation is underway to identify teachers' further needs in training support and curricular resources. In Ghana, servers were installed on site at each of the schools to allow access to tool-based and educational software that was provided, even in the event of lost connectivity.

SCHOOL-TO-SCHOOL CONNECTIONS

We're also enhancing the quality of students' educational experience by harnessing this technology to create cross-cultural learning opportunities.

Our School-To-School Connections initiative is a flagship ICT program of Connect To Learn, pioneered by another of our partners, the Earth Institute. The program connects classrooms in impoverished African communities with classrooms in the U.S. and other countries to cultivate global awareness.

We forge partnerships between schools in Africa and schools in the U.S. that allow students and teachers on opposite sides of the world to communicate with each other directly, using online collaboration tools, email, Skype or video conferencing. We start by selecting schools able to commit to a 1-2 year collaborations, and identifying good school matches. Teacher Coordinators at each school collaborate with partner teachers to develop and manage lesson plans and oversee classroom implementation.

My colleague, Lawrence Ssenkubuge of the Millennium Villages project, who is a former teacher and school principal, said of his experience with School-To-School Connections sais simply: "Our kids will never be the same after this experience."

I've been incredibly inspired to hear about the creative ways that School-to-School partners are interacting with one another – both the teachers and the students! Classrooms have done community mapping through shared photos; they have initiated planting projects where they compare their experiences growing the same plant in their respective environments; they've done 'day-in-the-life' exercises comparing and contrasting how they spend their days; and they sing their favorite songs to one another.

I'll share with you some of the student comments sent to me from a fifth grade teacher in New Canaan, CT. Kristen Ball has done wonderful things for her students with this program, even visiting Kenya to meet her partner teacher and classroom.

Last year her stories about her trip inspired one of her fifth grade students, Gracie, to start her own intervention program, forming an organization to collect discarded prescription eyeglasses and distribute them to those who can't afford eye care in the Millennium Villages. We just got word yesterday that Gracie has collected 500 pairs of glasses!

This year Kristen's 5th grade class is partnered with a primary and secondary school in the Millennium Village of Mbola in Tanzania, and they recently read aloud to each other from their favorite books on World Read Aloud Day.

- One Connecticut student wrote, "The kids in Mbola are so much like us. I realized after the Skype call how much we have in common. But we are different too because they are so poor. Poverty simply must be stopped because we are being a bit greedy getting computers and flat screen TVs when they don't even have running water."
- And here's a second one that I found particularly insightful: "The call to Mbola was very important because in the future we will all look back and say, "I still can't believe that fifty years ago people were doing whatever they could do to help people out of poverty." Just like us looking at the Civil Rights Movement and saying, "I can't believe that fifty years ago, they treated people like that."

Our vision for the School-To-School Connections program is to foster a feeling of connection and commonality between children around the world – and to create a sense of shared responsibility for tackling the global challenges we all face, including that of extreme poverty. As I watched the kids cheering each other on during their Skype call and eagerly asking questions; and then later read through the written comments from the students in New Canaan, I realized that that vision can quickly become a reality.

A SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON GIRLS

We also hope to use our School-To-School Connections program to support girls' secondary schooling experience, bringing girls together around the world. Over the coming weeks, graduate students from Teachers College and SIPA at Columbia University are traveling to our schools in the Bonsaaso Millennium Village in Ghana and the Mbola Millennium Village in Tanzania to spend their summer on site at schools Connect To Learn supports. Their aim during their time at the schools is to work with teachers, our girl student scholarship recipients, and Education Ministry officials to determine how we can help develop programs tailored to the special challenges and needs of adolescent girls locally. Extracurricular Girls Clubs, for instance, could utilize ICT to bring together girls from across town, across the continent and/or across the seas to share common experiences, interact with role models and peers in different communities and parts of the world, cultivate leadership abilities, and develop practical skills of using technology.

ICT IMPACT ON GIRLS

Creating access to better learning resources through technology benefits all students, both girls and boys – as well as their teachers—but I would like to address the particular ways in which it bolsters girls' educational experience, because it is noteworthy.

It is becoming increasingly clear that technology training boosts girls' self-esteem - it levels the playing field in male-dominant cultures where girls might be timid about speaking up in class by giving them a way to explore and learn independently. In an evaluation conducted in four African countries by Worldlinks, a program that provides Internet connectivity and training to secondary students and teachers, 95 percent of participating girls said that the program had increased their confidence and self-esteem.

In another study, conducted in 11 developing countries, teachers reported that having computers in their school has had an influence on 75 percent of girls' classroom participation, 77 percent of their learning outcomes, 66 percent of their written communication skills, and 75 percent of their ability to access important health information.

Socio-cultural barriers have famously prevented girls everywhere – not just in the developing world – from pursuing education. But with mounting evidence about the positive impact that educated girls make on our society—and that ICT knowledge is making on girls—we must be vigilant about closing the gender gap in every aspect of education.

With all our programmatic work we aim to help build relevant, practical skills that will help prepare girls—and boys—for personal and economic empowerment as young adults.

ALLIANCE-BUILDING FOR PRIVATE SECTOR PARTICIPATION, GLOBAL ADVOCACY & AWARENESS

The third aspect of Connect to Learn's work is in supporting and further catalyzing a global advocacy and awareness campaign around the importance of universal access to secondary education.

We aim to work with a broad alliance of partners, including the new MDG Advocates of UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, to help map out key issues, goals and challenges to this goal. It is a massive organizational, educational, and financial challenge and will require support of many partners including governments, academia, civil society, the private sector and the donor community. The expertise and input of a broad range of actors is critical. We're working to identify the key partnerships and collaborations that will be required to make success feasible.

We need to put education back at the top of the international agenda. The time is now: every year that passes, millions of children are missing out on an education. We have the technology and the resources – we need to make the case for putting those resources into education. Those of us in the education sector have to do a better job at advocacy - at spreading the word about the tremendous benefits of education and about the risks of not educating millions of children around the world.

At Connect to Learn, we're making a strong case for the impact and urgency of universal secondary education, especially for girls. We're talking with partners about a funding mechanism that pulls in support from new contributors from around the globe.

And we're building a global coalition for private sector innovation and financial support that will work together through key collaborations and partnerships to implement practical interventions on the ground that demonstrate the tremendous power of ICT for ensuring a 21st century education for everyone, no matter where in the world they live.

PRIVATE SECTOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The private sector has a great role to play in putting resources and expertise into the cause - particularly the broadband industry. It's one of the most innovative and lucrative industries in the world and already have some extraordinary successes in using technology for good. There is a fantastic opportunity for partnership on a large scale with the broadband industry, which can play an enormous role in transforming global education and, with that, initiating profound change.

It's amazing to see how fast technology is evolving to address challenges in the developing world. We are now using the cell phone to do health diagnostics on the spot in rural communities. We are seeing 3G and 4G and the move to wireless. There are huge possibilities for education.

We're living through a technology revolution. We're on the cusp of a major breakthrough - a time when all kinds of information will be accessible to everyone through ICT. If we seize the moment and invest in integrating technology into

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learning worldwide, we have the opportunity to revolutionize education – creating global classrooms, and introducing children in remote parts of the world to the skills they will need to thrive in the 21st century.

Access to learning and teaching resources and libraries is fundamental and the impact of connecting educators and students around the world is transformational for people everywhere, not just those who live in isolated villages. Connect To Learn is trying to link all these things.

We are piloting powerful, practical interventions, using connectivity in schools in Africa, using the ideal platform and testing ground of the Millennium Villages Project to see what we can achieve. We plan to roll them out in our Millennium Villages Project villages with the help of our experts on the ground, refine them there, and then scale them. We have the infrastructure. There are more than 4000 girls in the Millennium Villages across Sub-Saharan African ready to enroll in secondary school this year. Our goal is to provide scholarships for all of those students who pass their exams and require financial support in order to continue their schooling beyond primary education.

With today's technological revolutions, and with governmental commitment to policy change that prioritizes education for all as well as private sector support, every child in the world will have the opportunity to learn.

Our vision is of a world in which a girl in the most remote village can walk into a classroom and connect to people and information across the globe, opening the door to a new world of knowledge and possibility.