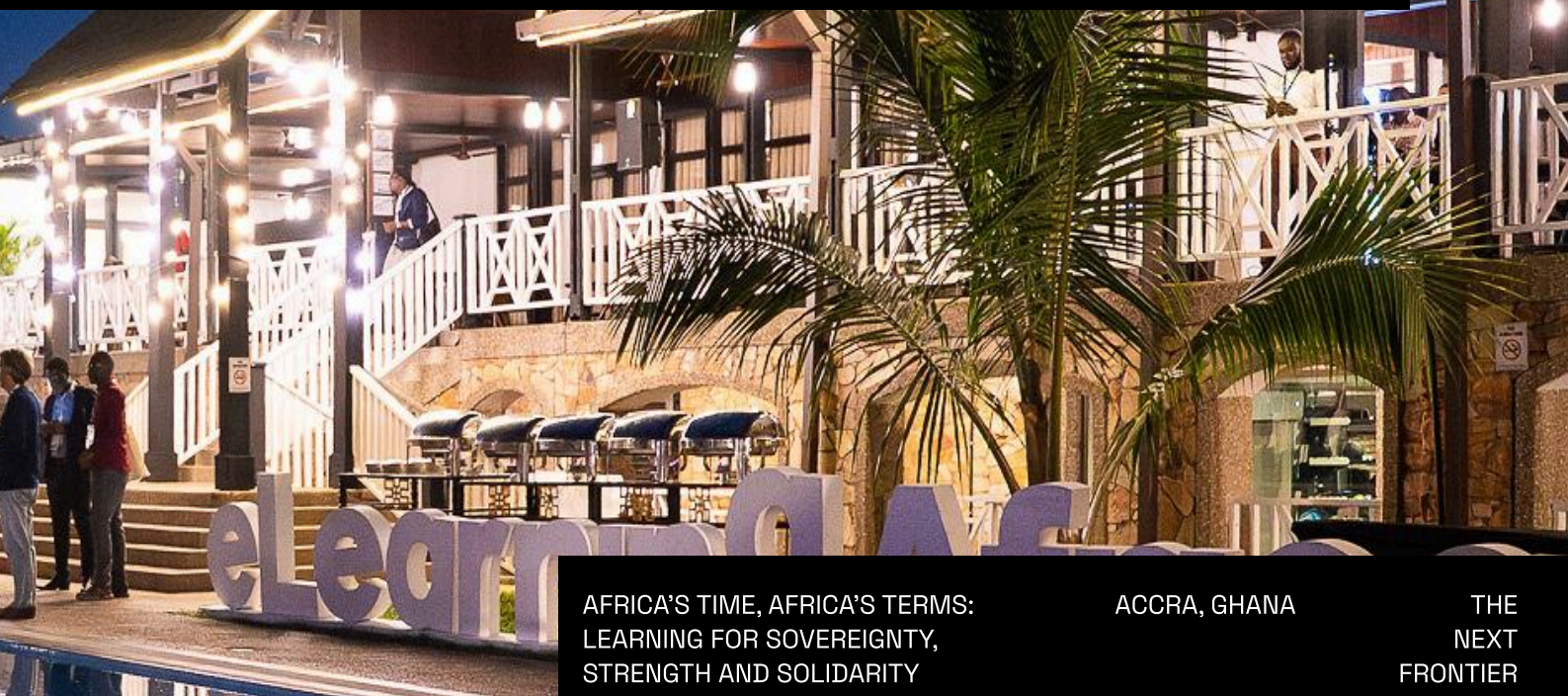


19TH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE & EXHIBITION

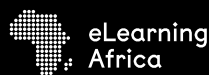


AFRICA'S TIME, AFRICA'S TERMS:
LEARNING FOR SOVEREIGNTY,
STRENGTH AND SOLIDARITY

ACCRA, GHANA

THE
NEXT
FRONTIER

ON DIGITAL EDUCATION, TRAINING & SKILLS DEVELOPMENT



3-5
JUNE

AFRICA'S TIME, AFRICA'S TERMS: LEARNING FOR SOVEREIGNTY, STRENGTH AND SOLIDARITY

Insights from the Future of Education in Africa.
an extract from conversations at the 19th eLearning Summit

eLEARNING AFRICA



Every ten years, Africa adds roughly the equivalent of Germany's entire population to its youth workforce. The continent currently creates enough formal jobs for about a quarter of them.

The Wager

Here is the number that reframes every other number in this report: **19.7**. That is Africa's median age. Half the continent is younger than that. For comparison, the median age in China is 39. In Europe, it approaches 40. In the United States, it sits at 38.

By 2035, according to the IMF, more young Africans will enter the global workforce than the rest of the world combined. By 2050, one in every four people on Earth will be African. One in three young people globally will be African. The continent's population is on course to reach 2.5 billion, up from 1.5 billion today, a near doubling in 25 years driven by the youngest age structure of any region on the planet.

19.7

Africa's median age today
— UN Population Division / IMF Regional Economic Outlook 2024

2.5B

Africa's projected population by 2050
— UN DESA / UNECA 2024

40%

Sub-Saharan African schools with no electricity
— International Telecommunication Union Connectivity Report 2022

53M

Young people classified as NEET in sub-Saharan Africa
— ILO Global Employment Trends for Youth 2024

Africa Population Growth 1960–2050

Source: UN DESA / UNECA 2024



This demographic concentration is either the engine of the largest economic dividend in human history, or a crisis in slow motion. The difference between those two outcomes is not fate. It is education, infrastructure, and the political will to build both at scale, before the window closes.

This year's conference gathered in Accra in June 2026 did not flinch from that arithmetic. [The 19th edition of eLearning Africa](#) brought more than 1,200 participants from over 80 countries: ministers, deputy ministers, educators, technologists, and development professionals who spent three days in the same room asking the same question from different angles.

Is Africa's education system adequate for what is coming?

The evidence they brought with them was not comfortable.

Africa currently generates roughly 3 million formal jobs every year. Between 10 and 12 million young people enter the workforce over the same period. The gap is not narrowing, it is opposite, its growing rapidly. The ILO's 2024 Global Employment Trends for Youth report found that three in four young workers in sub-Saharan Africa lack secure employment. In the same year, 53 million young people across the region were classified as NEET, not in employment, education, or training. Agriculture accounts for 47% of all youth jobs, and 96% of youth employment is informal.

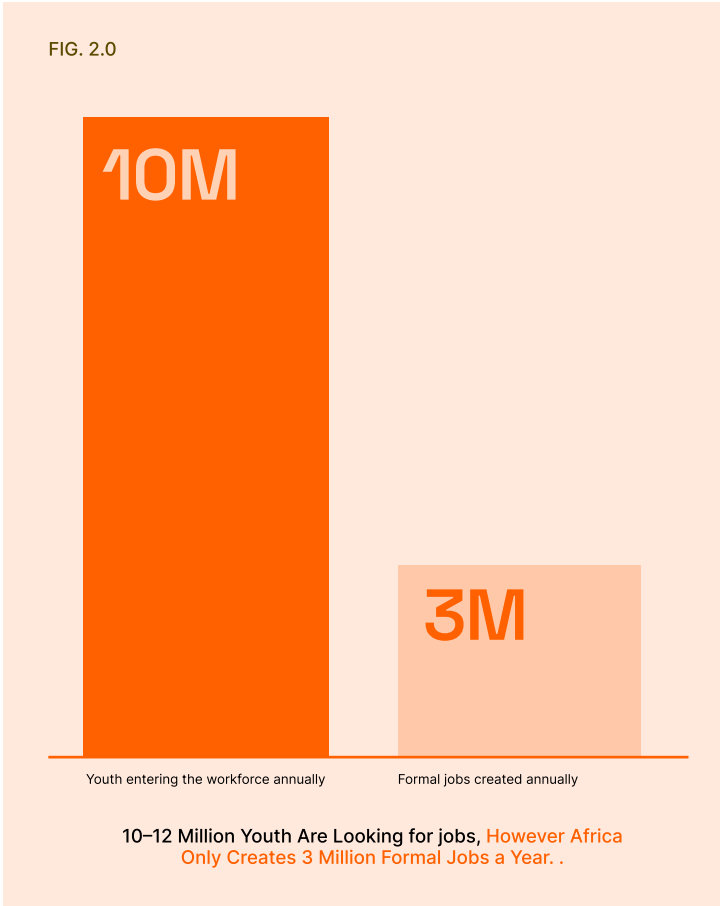
That gap is partly a structural economic problem. But it is also a curriculum problem, a connectivity problem, and an infrastructure problem. You cannot train a generation for a digital economy in a school without the main prerequisite resource, electricity.

Forty percent of sub-Saharan African schools have no electricity. Not no internet. Not no computers. No electricity. That figure comes from the ITU's 2022 connectivity report and should anchor every conversation about AI in African classrooms, digital literacy curricula, however, it rarely does.

The connectivity numbers sit just above that floor. In 2025, 36% of Africans were active internet users, compared to a global average of 74%. Only 40% of African primary schools had internet access in 2024. And the schools that do have connectivity are concentrated in urban areas, which means the digital divide inside the continent roughly tracks the wealth divide.

Jobs Gap: Youth Entering Workforce vs Formal Jobs Created

Annual figures · Millions · Source: AfDB / ILO Global Employment Trends for Youth 2024

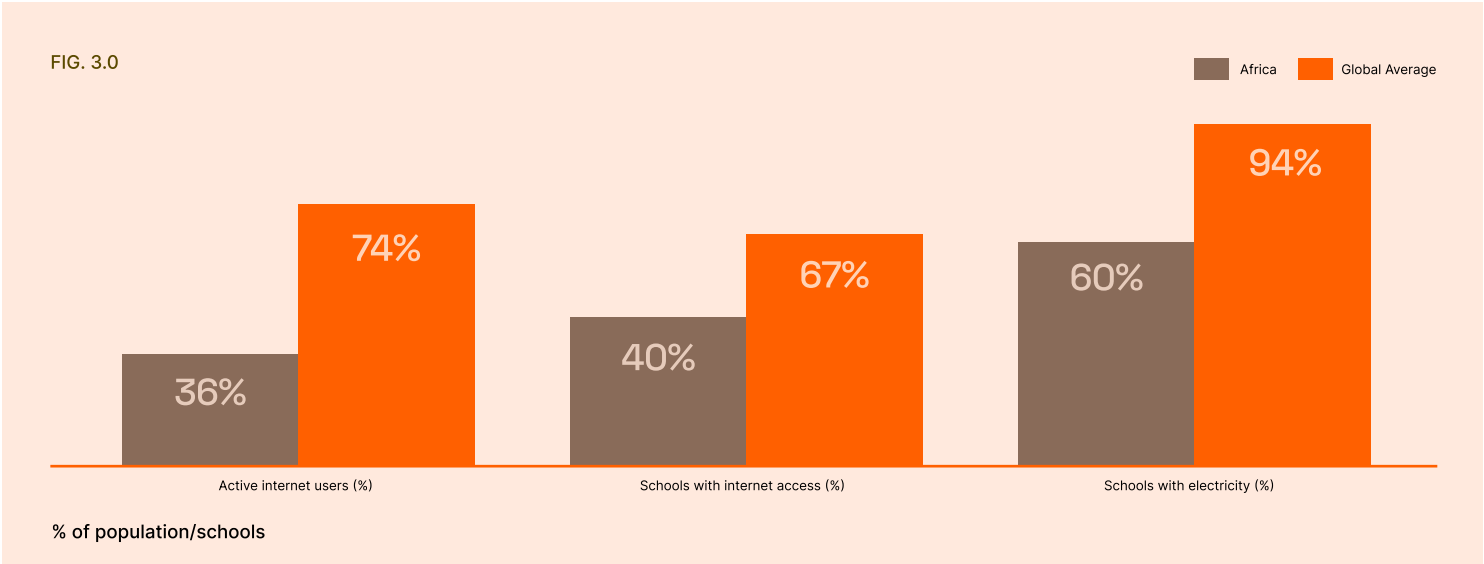


The wager Africa is making, at every summit, in every policy document, and in the classrooms being built right now, is that it can close those gaps fast enough to convert demographic weight into economic power. The three days in Accra were about whether that wager is winnable, who gets to define the terms, and what it will actually cost to win it.

The debate the conference staged on its final day returned a narrow verdict. Africa's education systems are not failing. They are inadequate. That distinction matters more than it might seem. Failing systems collapse. Inadequate ones keep producing graduates into a world they were not designed for, quietly, at scale, year after year.

Digital Infrastructure Deficit — Africa vs Global Average

Source: ITU 2025, DigitalDefynd / UNESCO 2024



The adequacy question is the one this report follows. The next two sections document what was said about what inadequacy costs, and what sovereignty over the solution would actually require of Africans.







The Verdict

Africa's education systems are not failing. They are producing graduates for a world that has already moved on. The distinction matters, and so does who gets to define the replacement.

The motion the conference staged on its final day was deliberate in its discomfort: "This house believes that Africa's education systems are preparing young people for a world that no longer exists and setting them up to fail as a result." Four practitioners argued it. The house voted. The motion passed, narrowly.

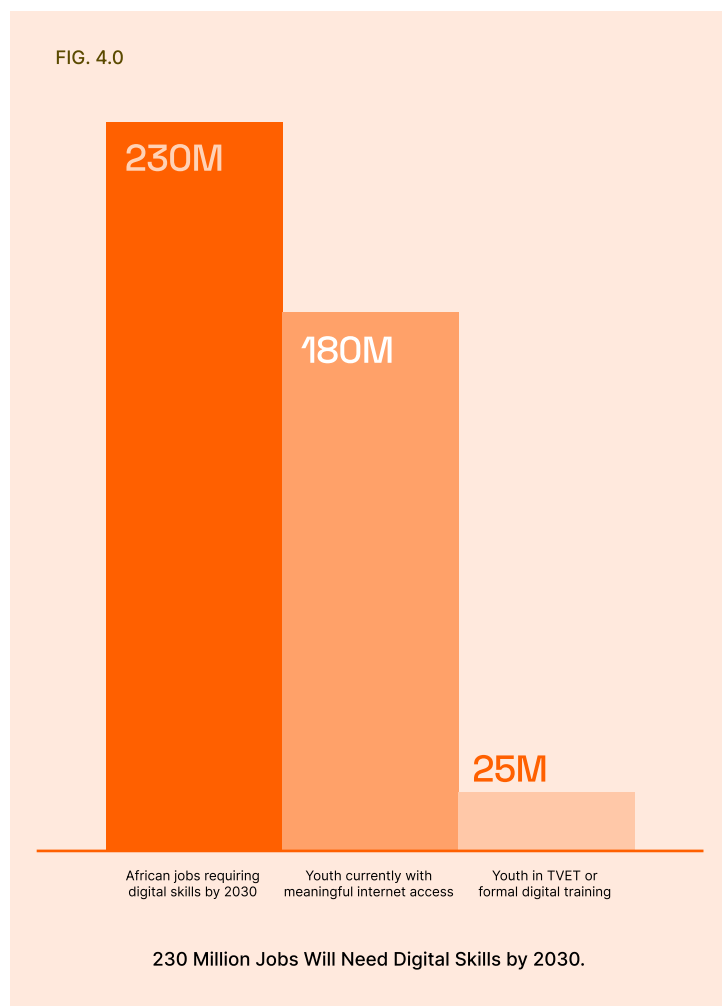


But the more important word was not in the motion. It came from one of the participants in closing. The word was "inadequate." Not failing. Not broken. Inadequate. Systems can be inadequate and still be running. They can produce graduates, issue certificates, and report enrollment numbers while quietly training people for a labour market that has moved beyond them. That is what inadequate looks like at scale.

The data fills in the detail. By 2030, an estimated 230 million African jobs will require some level of digital skills. Today, only about 25 million young Africans are enrolled in formal digital or technical vocational training. The gap between those two numbers is not a future problem. The students who will fill those jobs in 2030 are already in school now.

Digital Skills Demand vs Current Training Pipeline

Source: EPRC 2025, ITU 2025, UNESCO 2024





The skills mismatch is documented from multiple directions. In South Africa, 84% of companies report difficulty recruiting critically skilled professionals despite some of the highest youth unemployment rates on the continent. Research tracking graduate employment across African universities found that in Business, Administration and Law, only 21 jobs exist per 100 graduates produced annually. Meanwhile demand for data analysts, software developers, and cybersecurity specialists continues to outpace supply everywhere.

That pattern is not unique to South Africa. It repeats across the continent: credential inflation on one side, skills scarcity on the other. The curricula producing the credentials were designed for a different economy. In many cases they have not been substantially revised since.

Changing the curriculum is the obvious fix. But the deeper argument that surfaced at the conference runs underneath curriculum. Even if every African school adopted a digitally-forward programme tomorrow, what tools would students learn on? What AI systems would they train with? And in what language?

Africa is home to between 1,500 and 2,000 languages. A 2025 study examining major large language models found that only 42 African languages appear in any meaningful way across the systems reviewed. Google Translate, one of the most widely deployed translation tools globally, covers fewer than 50. Most LLMs are trained on data that is more than 90% English. The tools entering African classrooms were not built for African students. They were built on almost no African data at all.

The data center picture is even starker. Africa is home to 17% of the world's population. It accounts for 1% of global data center capacity. Less than 4% of the data used to train the world's most powerful AI systems originates from the continent. African data, when it is collected, is mostly stored, processed, and monetised outside Africa, beyond the reach of African law, African courts, and African institutions.

This is the argument the conference kept returning to from different angles. The digital tools entering African education are not neutral. They reflect the languages, the contexts, the assumptions, and the economic interests of the places that built them. An African student learning through an AI tutor trained on less than 4% African data is not just underserved. She is being educated in someone else's frame.

230M

African jobs requiring digital skills by 2030
— Economic Policy Research Centre 2025

21

Jobs available per 100 graduates in
Business, Administration and Law —
ResearchGate / EPRC 2025

<4%

Share of global AI training data originating from
Africa — Interface Media 2025

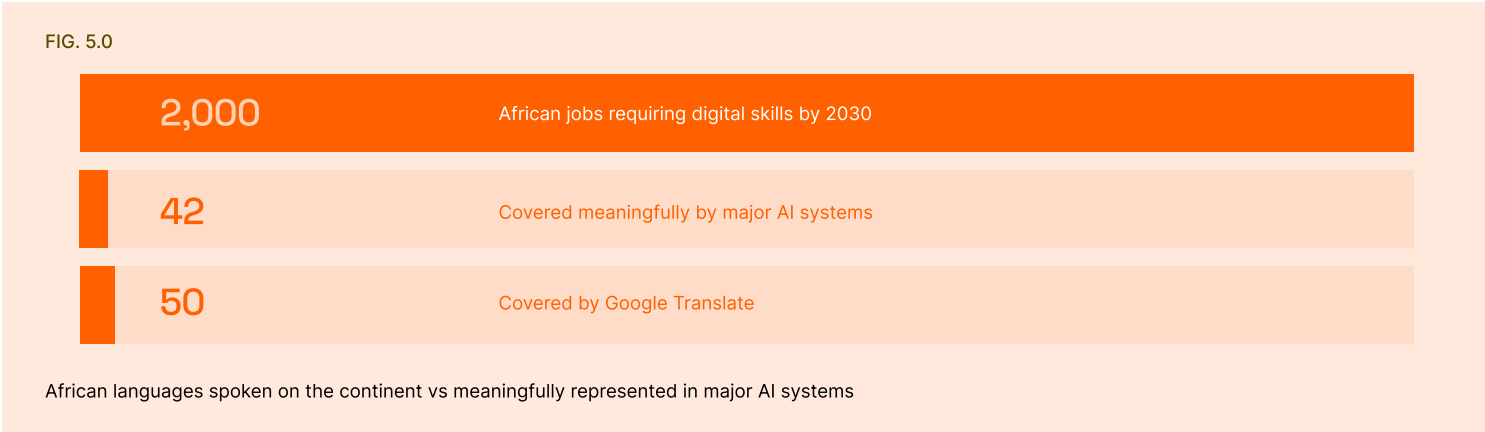
84%

Companies in South Africa unable to recruit
critically skilled professionals — Xpatweb
Critical Skills Survey 2025



African Languages Spoken vs Represented in AI

Source: Global Voices / AfricaNLP 2025, Amplify Initiative 2025



Africa’s Share of Population vs Data Infrastructure vs AI Training Data

Source: Interface Media 2025, AU 2024, Tech in Africa 2025



That is what "whose classroom" means in practice. Not who built the building. Who controls what gets taught inside it, and in whose language, and through whose infrastructure.







The Terms

Thirty ministries spent two days in the same room agreeing on one word. The word was "sovereignty." No two of them meant the same thing.

The ministerial round table on day two was the most revealing session of the conference. Not because of what was agreed, but because of what the disagreements exposed. Thirty-plus ministries of education, all speaking the language of sovereignty, all with fundamentally different definitions of what that word requires in practice.

Some meant regulatory sovereignty: the right to set curricula without external diktat, to licence EdTech platforms on national terms, to require data from students to stay within national borders. Some meant physical sovereignty: data centers on African soil, servers owned by African institutions, computing infrastructure that keeps the continent's educational data inside its own jurisdiction. Some meant architectural sovereignty: the right to design systems from the ground up rather than adopt platforms built for different contexts and retrofit them. And some meant something broader, a geopolitical sovereignty, where education is understood as a site of power, not just service delivery, and where who trains the teachers, who builds the tools, and who sets the standards determines long-term dependence or independence.

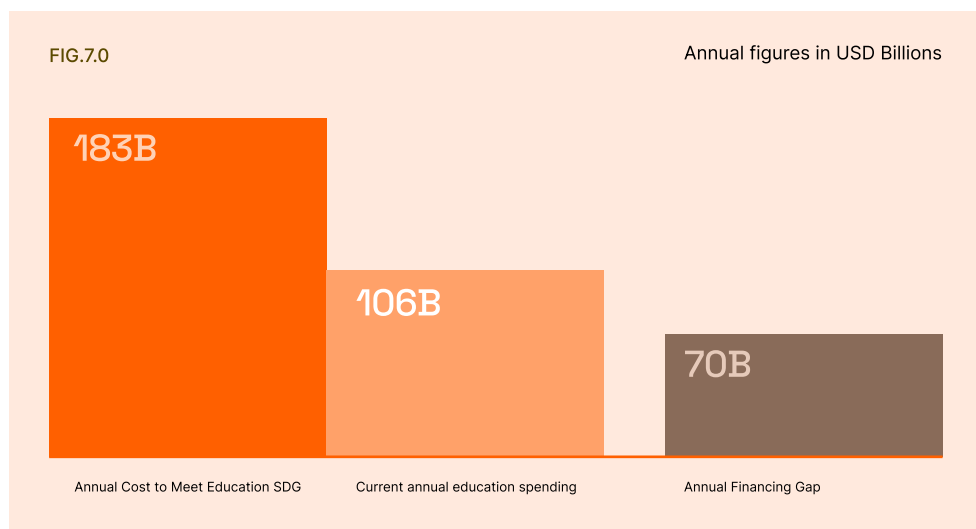
None of these four definitions are wrong. They just require different things, different budgets, different timelines, and different political coalitions. The round table surfaced all four without resolving the tension between them.



The financing data makes that tension concrete. Africa's annual education financing gap is \$77 billion. That figure, from UNESCO's 2024 Global Education Monitoring Report, represents the difference between what African countries need to spend annually to meet their own SDG 4 education targets by 2030, and what they are currently spending. It is not a small rounding error. It is 42% of the total cost of achieving the targets.

Africa's Annual Education Financing Gap

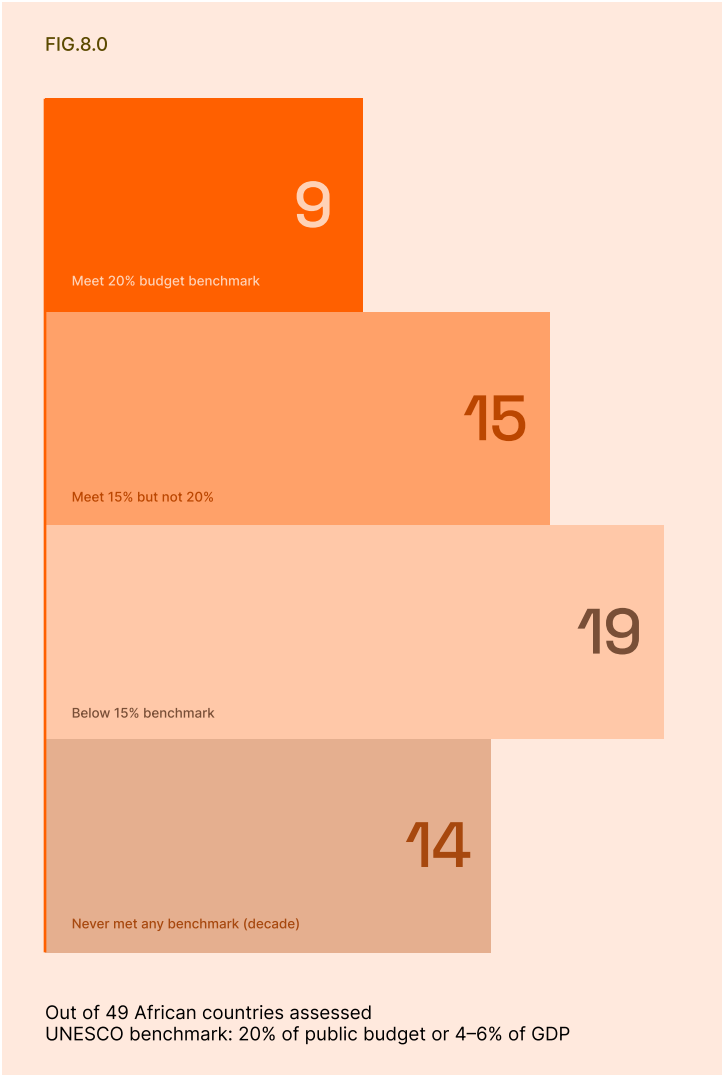
Source: UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report 2024 / UNESCO-World Bank Education Finance Watch 2024



The commitments predate the gap by a decade. In 2015, all 54 African nations signed the Incheon Declaration, pledging to direct 4 to 6 percent of GDP, or 15 to 20 percent of public budgets, to education. In December 2024, the AU raised the upper benchmark to 7 percent via the Nouakchott Declaration. Yet only 9 of 49 assessed countries actually meet the 20% budget benchmark. Fourteen have not met any benchmark in a single year over the past decade.

African Countries Meeting Education Spending Benchmarks

Source: UNICEF / UNESCO 2024



One minister at the round table proposed something specific: a 1 to 2 percent GDP contribution from each member state into a pooled continental digital education infrastructure fund. The logic was sound. Fragmented national investment produces fragmented national systems. A pooled fund would enable shared infrastructure, shared platforms, shared data governance standards. The proposal was noted. No mechanism was attached to it before the session closed.

That gap between a good idea and an implementation structure is the one the conference could not close. It is also the most important gap of all.

The EdTech market is not waiting. Africa's digital education sector was valued at roughly \$3 billion in 2021. Projections now put it at \$19.7 billion by 2034, growing at nearly 20% annually. That capital is moving whether or not the sovereignty frameworks catch up with it. Platforms are being deployed in African classrooms. Data is being collected. Infrastructure decisions are being made. Each one either extends the dependency the round table spent two days critiquing, or begins to build something different.



30+

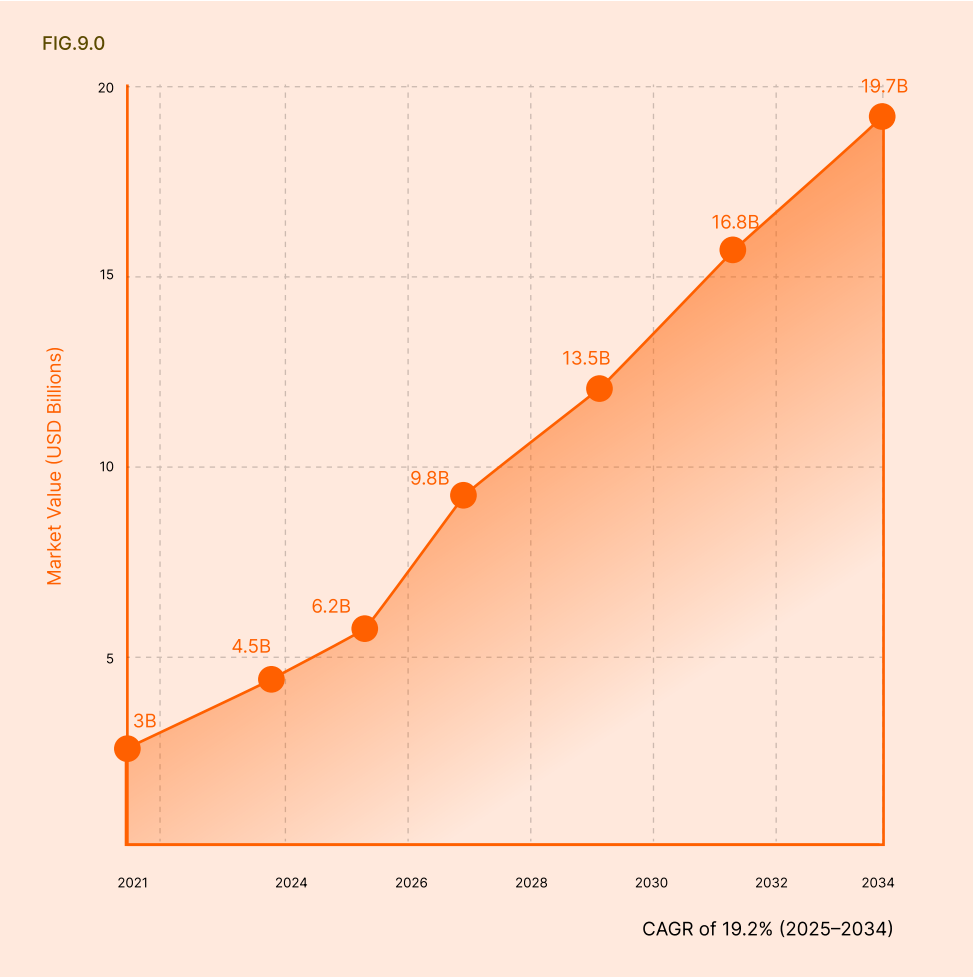
Ministries of education represented at the eLearning Africa 2026 ministerial round table



What the conference produced was not a binding agreement. What it produced was a shared vocabulary, a common acknowledgment that the adequacy question from the debate, the ownership question from the classroom, and the financing question from the round table are all the same question asked from different angles. You cannot build sovereign education infrastructure on an \$77 billion annual deficit. You cannot claim ownership of the classroom when the tools inside it were built elsewhere, trained on someone else's data, and governed under someone else's law.

Africa EdTech Market Growth 2021–2034

Source: IMARC Group / Included VC / Medium 2026



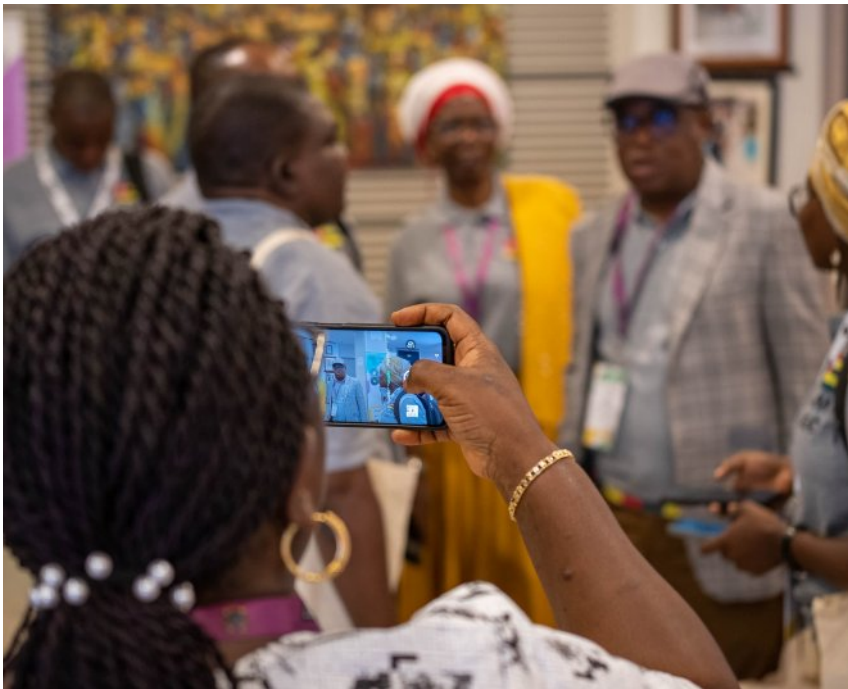
\$19.7B

Projected value of Africa's EdTech market by 2034 — IMARC Group 2026

The terms Africa is setting for its educational future will be written in the next five years, not the next fifty. The ministries that left Accra in June 2026 carried a clearer picture of the problem than when they arrived. What they do next with that picture is the only thing that will matter.













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